



Digital Devil Story

Warrior of the Demon City

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Part One: Return

Part 1: Chapter 1

In Massachusetts, there is an old port town called Salem. In the nineteenth century, it flourished as a fishing harbor, but its fate fluctuated along with the American fishing industry, and currently less than a tenth of the population at the apex of its prosperity lived there, now eking out a meager existence in the food processing industry. In the center of the town, the now boat-free canal, filled with muddy water, flows out into the bay. Along this canal, the rays of the summer sun reflected off of the white paint peeling off the boards of old houses, relics of the town in more prosperous times.

On one block of these houses stood a cheap brick hotel, built before the First World War, yet still standing despite not being renovated even once. On the second floor, there was a room. This room was devoid of furniture other than a bed and telephone, and the only sound to be heard inside was that of the rattling of an ancient GE air conditioner's compressor. The man in this room ignored it, though, and focused on working with the handheld computer in front of him. He was probably close to fifty years old, wore a black cloak over a yellowed old flaxen robe, and worn leather boots on his feet. His shoulder-length silver hair fit the medieval sorcerer's garb he wore perfectly.

The man's name was Isma Feed. He was the younger brother of Charles Feed, the famous engineer and magical researcher of MIT. In contrast to his elder brother, who founded his organization, ISG, so that alchemy and magic could further science and society, Isma's purpose in life was to master dark sorcery and the black arts for nefarious ends. People that knew Isma were deathly afraid of him. To be sure, as he was hunched over the display, his eyes darting across the screen like a hawk, Isma certainly resembled a demon in demeanor.

Isma's handheld computer was connected to the telephone jack, and was communicating with ISG's (International Satanist Garden) AI, Craft, online. Scrutinizing the latest data that Craft was giving him, Isma narrowed his eyes in thought, and his long, bony fingers tapped the keyboard.

> IS THAT TRUE?

> MAYBE.

The artificial intelligence responded immediately.

"....."

With a deep breath, Isma cut the connection to the AI.

"It's tough to believe at face value, but there doesn't seem to be any doubt that a young boy in Asia really did succeed in summoning a demon with a computer." As he murmured,

somebody knocked on the door.

"Come in." Turning off his handheld computer, Isma turned his head toward the door, still leaning against the back of his chair. As he did, the elderly innkeeper opened the door with an awkward bitter smile on his face.

"Please excuse me. There is someone here who insists on seeing you..."

Not letting the old man finish, a huge sharp-eyed man entered the room, motioning the old man to leave with the barrel of his drawn handgun.

"The great magician Isma Feed. I've finally found you." The man's voice was laden with barely concealed hatred.

"You're...James, from the FBI, are you not? I applaud your efforts in finding my whereabouts, but this is certainly a rude manner in which to greet me. I presume you intend to arrest me--on what charges, may I ask?" Isma slowly stood up, a sarcastic smile on his face.

"As you may know, we're not famous for our subtlety down at the FBI. And if I were to cite each and every one of your crimes, it would take all day." Despite the strength of his words, the man's voice trembled ever so slightly, as if being intimidated by Isma's stare.

"Come quietly. I don't want to have to drag your corpse around." Bluffing, the man cocked his pistol and pointed the barrel at Isma's chest.

"Well, dealing with your corpse wouldn't bother me one bit..." Isma's pale blue eyes glittered with cold light as he stared at the man.

Despite his seemingly overwhelming advantage in the situation, the man could not speak, and simply met Isma's gaze. Silence filled the room, and a large bead of sweat trickled down his temple. Presently Isma started walking toward the man, his robe dragging on the floor behind him as if wiping it clean.

"Stop! Don't come one step closer!" Crying out in a dry voice, the man readied his handgun and took a step backwards.

"James, if you wanted to take me on, you should have called for backup first. Of course, one person or three people, the result would still be the same."

Isma's cold eyes glimmered. As they did, the barrel of the gun slowly started to move on its own, sweeping across the filthy wall as if to wipe it clean.

The man grabbed his right hand with his left, trying his utmost to stop it. But as if being twisted by a powerful, invisible hand, his right hand slowly but surely pointed the gun at his face.

"Stop, please stop. Argh..." The sour, chilly taste of the barrel of the gun filled his mouth, forcing his saliva and cries down his throat. As both his hands fought each other for control of the gun, the man bent backward and looked up at the ceiling.

BANG!

The low sound of the gunshot shook the room, and the man fell backward, spilling his blood and brains on the floor through the hole in the back of his head.

"Joseph, as usual, please clean up afterwards." Taking a glance at the mangled body, Isma spoke to the elderly innkeeper cowering in the corner.

"I am going to Japan. This time, it may end up being a long trip." Crushing globs of brain and blood under his leather boots, Isma disappeared through the door, leaving reddish-black footprints behind him.

Part 1: Chapter 2

Tokyo, Kuniritsu.

Now summer vacation, the plaza of Jusho High was empty. The blazing sun, now slightly less fierce, quietly illuminated the building. As if trying to avoid its rays, housewives and students walking by the rows of gingko trees along University Avenue cast curious glances in its direction.

A week ago, the school's CAI room had been destroyed, and the entire class that had been in a lesson there had vanished.

"The entire class colluded together to destroy the facility, and then ran off somewhere." That was the explanation their instructor, Ohara, had given. But nobody could have even imagined the truth behind the incident, which was like a symbol of the growing violence that had been going on inside the school.

One of the seniors at the school, Nakajima Akemi, with his handsome feminine looks, had had a tendency to be an object of jealousy amongst the other male students. Blessed with genius computing ability, Nakajima had discovered the similarities between computer theory and magical theory, and succeeded in summoning the digital data of the demon Loki with his computer. Using Loki's power, Nakajima had attempted to exact revenge on other students who had wronged him. Living inside the CAI room's computer as a digital construct, Loki had granted Nakajima's wish by taking control of the students attending lecture there.

Meanwhile, in secret, Loki had achieved a physical body on his own, and Nakajima started becoming a threat to him. The beautiful teacher Ohara, who had been given to Loki as an offering, was enthralled by the demon's charm, and learned to operate the demon summoning program in Nakajima's stead. Soon Loki had slipped from Nakajima's control, and became a man-eating beast that started brutal killing sprees. Feeling a deep responsibility for the results caused by his curiosity and desire for vengeance, Nakajima summoned the demon beast Kerberos and challenged Loki. He was defeated, but an unlikely ally had appeared in the battle.

It was the Japanese goddess Izanami, who had possessed Shirasagi Yumiko, a transfer student with a crush on Nakajima. In the indescribably harsh battle, the CAI room had been reduced to ruins. And Izanami teleported the wounded Nakajima and Yumiko to Asuka, the place of her burial. Loki too headed to Asuka in hot pursuit.

Of course, nobody could possibly have known the true circumstances of the incident, and only the surface end results made it to the mass media in a typical sensationalist manner.

"Elite Class Destroys Classroom and Disappears!" That, and similar titles, were what were making the headlines of the weekly papers.

Until the police had concluded their investigation, the CAI room in question was off limits. Though it had fainted considerably, a stench that was difficult to withstand still wafted through the rubble-strewn room. The machine room, miraculously undamaged, separated from the rest of the classroom by cracked plate glass, had a suspicious figure lurking in it. Deep red fingernails massaged the terminal's keyboard. The LED light of the disk drive flashed busily. It appeared to be copying either a long program or huge amount of data. As the copying finished, filling ten large 8-inch floppy disks, the woman breathed a sigh of relief.

"Professor Ohara, are you done yet?" Reluctantly opening the door, the janitor looked around the area before sticking his head into the machine room.

"If they find out I let you in here I could get in big trouble."

"I'm really sorry. I'll be done in just a minute." As the woman spoke in a nasal tone, the janitor grudgingly pulled his head back. Softly clicking her tongue, she returned to her typing. A message displayed on the screen.

> PROGRAM "DEMON" DELETE YES OR NO?

The computer was asking whether or not she wanted to delete one of its programs.

> YES

Slowly entering the command, the woman pressed the Return key. As she did, the magnetic tapes of the host computer emotionlessly spun and clattered, before soon grinding to a halt. That instant, the demon summoning program that Nakajima Akemi had written vanished without a trace from the Jusho High computer system.

Resting his elbows on the concrete fence surrounding the school building, Isma Feed stood like a shadow. He was dressed like he was in Massachusetts, draped in a black cloak over a yellowing flaxen robe, and wearing black leather boots. Despite his unusual appearance, the people passing by him on the street appeared to be paying him no heed at all. It was not as if they were avoiding him deliberately; rather, it was as if they did not even realize that he was standing there. Isma had surrounded himself in a magical field. The ability to hide one's presence with a magical field was thought to be the speciality of the Japanese Onmyojis, but its roots were actually far older, and had been mastered by ancient Mayan magicians far earlier. For Isma, who was a descendant of those same magicians, hiding his presence was an easy task. But his eyes, turned to the school building, were full of discontent.

I can't sense anything. There seems to be no doubt that the boy named Nakajima summoned a demon, but I can't feel any demonic presence...

Isma had noticed the similarities between computer theory and magical theory years ago. He had thought the reason that it was so difficult to summon demons into the human world

was that it was easy for the weather and the earth's magnetic field to interfere in the environment needed to successfully perform a summoning. Therefore, he theorized that if he was able to create a strong magnetic field inside a computer, it would be possible to eliminate said outside influences and thus was attempting to do so himself. However, upon learning from the ISG databanks that a young man in Japan already succeeded in doing so, he immediately flew to Tokyo.

Looks like I'm just going to have to take the time to search out Nakajima Akemi myself.

Disappointed, Isma slowly turned around and started to walk away, when he heard a pleading voice say "Professor, please keep all this a secret..." Turning around, he saw an ordinary-looking middle-aged man calling to a woman carrying a large bag. The woman waved her hand irritately and started walking toward Isma.

She was a very alluring woman. Her beautiful symmetrical body--one that could easily be that of a model--emitted feminine charm. Her hot yet somehow dark gaze could not help but kindle desire in any man that saw her. But that was not all; Isma sensed something from Ohara that set off his instincts as a magician. A smile formed on Isma's lips as his eyes traveled up and down her body.

A demon really DID come to the Assiah world. The demonic life within that woman's body is the proof.

Isma blinked twice, three times rhythmically. Perhaps it was a gesture to drop the magical field surrounding him, but Ohara stopped in her tracks as if struck by lightning.

Ohara's love for Loki was special. She had been given as an offering to the demon Loki by Nakajima Akemi in June. At the time, the digital Loki had made love to her in a virtual world. The voluptuous Ohara was no stranger to sex, but the intense, nearly-fatal ecstasy she felt from sleeping with a demon had brought out the innate feminine devilishness within her to its utmost extremes. Soon Loki materialized, gaining the ability to take form in the human world. Ohara belonged to him heart and soul, and she became impregnated with his child. But after chasing Nakajima to Asuka to kill him, Loki had seemingly vanished off the face of the earth. Believing that it would be impossible for a demon as powerful as Loki to be defeated by one as weak as Nakajima, Ohara had tried to use the demon summoning program over and over again, but she had gotten no response from Loki. Instead, the only one that appeared was a different demon calling himself Set.

Furthermore, the critical CAI room had become off-limits after the incident there, so she couldn't use the computers there freely any longer. Finally Ohara had copied the demon summoning program, but she had no idea how and where she could run it to find Loki, and while mulling over what to do next, she noticed Isma and stopped in her tracks.

"Yod, Heh, Vay, Heh." The words of the spell that Loki had cast left Isma's lips.

"Who are you...?"

Ohara was entranced by the mysterious blue, shining eyes of this oddly-dressed foreigner. Isma closed those eyes halfway, whispered "Let's go" and silently started to walk. As if being pulled by an invisible line, Ohara followed after him.

Part 1: Chapter 3

That night, a man entered the Seito Plaza Hotel, a hotel amongst the high-rise buildings by the west exit of Shinjuku station, known for having large numbers of foreign guests. Short, bald, with a red face, he seemed out of place. But his body gave off a glittering energy, and the other guests all turned toward him as if on cue as he passed. Jogging past the lobby, the man headed to the elevator.

His name was Shimazaki Ryunosuke. He was an infamous tycoon, known for his shrewd buying and selling of conglomerates using foreign capital. In a single day, the more than three hundred companies under his control were said to make over 50 billion yen. Shimazaki was also known to have deep connections with the current ruling political party. Who could he be visiting here, alone and without his secretary? Spat out by the elevator as it stopped at the fifteenth floor, Shimazaki stopped in front of the door to room 1504.

"Loki is a demon. A demon can't die!" Shimazaki heard the hysterical cries of a woman, and he slowed a bit. Doubtfully pulling a memo out of his pocket and checking to make sure he was at the right room, Shimazaki reluctantly knocked on the door.

Shimazaki had known Isma from earlier and could recognize him on sight, and with barely a greeting, as soon as he had entered the room was asking if it was true or not that a demon really had been summoned. With a slightly offended look on his face, Isma went over the details of what he knew and had learned from Ohara.

"So then, instead of Loki, a demon named Set has now been summoned?" Shimazaki's question was hurried and impatient.

"According to Miss Ohara, it would appear so..." Isma looked back as he spoke. Ohara was trying to open the door and leave.

"Where are you going?" Isma's gaze stopped Ohara in her tracks.

"That's none of your business now, is it?" Ohara's tone was confrontational.

"I won't have you running out on your own and ruining things. Stay right here." His stare affixed on Ohara, Isma moved toward her a step at a time.

"I don't take orders from you!" As Ohara's eyes opened wide as she spoke, Isma's large, bony hands grabbed her by the back of the neck.

"Just what do you think you can do on your own? True, we don't know for sure that Loki is dead. But even if I let you continue to play with the summoning program, with your limited computer knowledge, you'd only end up getting killed by Set!" As he admonished her, Isma threw Ohara to the floor like so much useless rubbish.

Crawling on the carpet, Ohara glared up at Isma with eyes full of humiliation and

bewilderment, the white nape of her neck marred with reddish-black marks from his fingers. Like nothing had happened, Isma turned and continued to speak to Shimazaki.

"Mr. Shimazaki, I would like you to hurry and prepare a computer for me."

"Of course, Saint. I'll ready any machine you want, be it an IBM supercomputer or a Cray 1. In exchange, if you could let me use the power of the demon as well..." Rubbing his hands together, Shimazaki looked up at Isma.

As Isma responded with a sarcastic smile, his eyes drifted to Ohara, who was crawling towards the door in an attempt to escape.

"Don't you get it yet!?" As he yelled, Isma chanted the spell "Yog-sothoth Ya Rubikay Hara" in a low voice.

That instant, Ohara let out a cry like an animal and rolled around the floor, her hands frantically clutching at her throat. Her shining, manicured nails sunk into the flesh of her neck, and blood flowed from the wounds.

"Ohara, the mark on your neck will not vanish easily. As I continue to cast my spells, you will feel tightening pain as if you were being hung from the gallows."

Isma's harsh, merciless words sounded like a far off-echo to Ohara as she writhed on the floor in agony.

Part 1: Chapter 4

While this was going on, Nakajima was standing still, alone in Izanami's burial chamber, deep below Asuka. After enjoying a brief reunion with Yumiko, who had been brought back to life by Izanami's power, the goddess had taken her off the the land of Yomi.

As Yumiko had been drawn into the battle with demons against her will, Izanami wanted to give her the ability to defend herself at the very least. Meanwhile, Nakajima had been ordered to return to the human world. But still sensing Yumiko's presence, he was reluctant to leave the room, and as he was mulling about, his ears started to ring slightly. Looking up, he realized that at some point the crimson walls of the tomb had disappeared, and that he was surrounded by an empty void, almost like outer space.

What's going on?

All of a sudden, Izanami's voice sounded in his head.

"Stand up. And think of the person that needs you the most. Return to her." Realizing that Izanami was using her power to return him to the human world, Nakajima immediately pictured Yumiko in his mind. Immediately in front of him, white mist swirled around and formed into the face of a human.

"Yumiko!" As Nakajima called out, the face dissipated back into white mist.

"Nakajima, there's someone that needs you much more than me." Yumiko's familiar voice whispered an admonishment into his ears.

Soon after, he heard another familiar voice, painfully crying out his name--"Akemi, Akemi." Reflexively, Nakajima covered his ears with his hands. But the voice calling to him became louder and louder, and Nakajima felt as if he was getting smaller as the voice became louder. The white mist condensed again, into the face of a beautiful woman that looked quite a lot like him--his mother.

"Stop! I don't want to see you!" Nakajima cried out like a petulant child. Nakajima's antipathy toward his mother, who hardly ever bothered with her family, might have been strong enough to completely overwhelm his ego. But the billowing mist gradually started to envelop him.

"No!" As Nakajima desperately resisted, the mist's movement slowed slightly, and his mother's beautiful face looked down at him with sadness in her eyes. Her kind stare opened the stubborn Nakajima's heart like the unraveling of ropes binding a body down.

"Mom..."

The minute the word left his lips, his body became as a drop of condensation in a mist and he was wrapped in a feeling of pure extacy. The mist enshrouding Nakajima quietly moved toward the void. There was no distance or time there.

I want to stay like this forever... Nakajima thought.

But at some point, he became aware of an image in the nothingness. The outlines of white walls and a familiar room's lighting formed, and the profile of his mother entered his field of vision.

"Mom..."

As Nakajima reflexively called out, he felt all the blood being pulled out of his body along with a floating sensation like being in a weightless environment, and the next instant, his body was hit with a twisting shock as he was tossed somewhere. As he moaned and sat up, he had already been returned to the human world from Izanami's burial chamber.

A familiar sofa and sideboard stood in front of him. There, in his old living room, his mother sat, dejectedly twirling her disheveled hair with her fingers, not making a single motion to fix it. Though her face looked so young that she was often mistaken for Nakajima's older sister, it now was full of creases and wrinkles, and she looked almost twenty years older than she did before. Looking up, Nakajima's mother saw him in front of her, and she gaped at him in amazement.

As soon as she confirmed that this was indeed her son, she let out a wail like a cry of anguish, rushed over to Nakajima and hugged him madly, crying all the while.

That was the first time that Nakajima realized just how much taller he had grown than his mother. The difference must have been there for several years, but in that period, living with his mother without making so much as the slightest physical contact with her, Nakajima hadn't really looked at her as his mother in a true sense. But for the first time, he was starting to feel that reality, and all of a sudden he felt a great love for her.

As he patted his sobbing mother on the back, Nakajima softly spoke to her.

"I'm sorry, mom..."

Part 1: Chapter 5

At the same time that Isma was making his first chance meeting with Ohara, a foreigner was visiting the Chief Cabinet Secretary's office in the Prime Minister's estate.

"All right, Richard. I'll do my best for your friend, Dr. Feed." The Chief Cabinet Secretary, Fujita, hung up the phone, and perplexed, peered at the foreigner sitting on his sofa with steady eyes from behind his glasses. Pressing a button on his intercom, he barked a quick order--"Send in Narukawa from the Special Forces, Second Unit"--and stood up with a sigh.

"Dr. Feed, I've just accepted a request to see to your needs from Aide to the President Richard."

"Thank you." The tall and thin white man hurriedly stood up from the sofa. He had immaculate white hair and a white beard to match. He was Charles Feed, professor at MIT and founder of ISG.

"No need to hurry--hold on a minute, Dr. Feed." Trying to restrain his guest with an awkward smile, Fujita sat down on the sofa sitting across from Feed's.

"Why has someone as famous as you taken an interest in a missing persons report from a random high school in our country? I'm having trouble understanding why anyone as high-up as the Aide to the President would be getting involved in this..."

"Even if I tried to explain why, I doubt you'd believe me." Speaking in impeccable Japanese, Feed's expression clouded.

That moment, there was a knock on the door.

"Enter."

As Fujita turned around and spoke his order, a small, delicate man entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"Let me introduce you to Narukawa from the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office. You won't be able to conduct an investigation very easily going through the police's official channels. When this man is with you, I can guarantee that you will be able to go wherever you need to freely."

As Fujita finished his introduction, Narukawa extended his right hand out in greeting. There were burn scars on the pale back of his hand.

"It's a pleasure, Mr. Narukawa." The instant after Feed gripped Narukawa's hand, he looked up as if a bolt of electricity had shot through his body.

"Narukawa is a master of all sorts of martial arts. He will also serve as your bodyguard quite well." At Fujita's words, Narukawa looked up at Feed with a fearless smile on his slender face.

Part 1: Chapter 6

The next day came. The lines of trees of Musashino, bathed in blazing light from the sun, flowed past in a sliding motion outside the Cadillac heading toward Jusho High.

"This is all the material you have on Nakajima Akemi?" Sitting in the plush back seat of the car, Feed spoke to the unshaven Detective Iwama sitting next to him.

"Yes. He's just an ordinary high school student, so there's not much more that we could find on him. But Dr. Feed, do you really think that Nakajima is the ringleader behind the whole incident?" Detective Iwama did not approve of this American, clearly some sort of scientist, interfering with his investigation.

"In a way, I imagine that he's actually a victim. But he certainly played a very large part in the incident."

"Do you have any evidence to prove that?" Iwama's voice barely concealed his irritation.

We investigated each one of the students ages ago. It's true that Nakajima Akemi appeared to be an unusual student, but there was no evidence of him having any violent tendencies. The teachers seemed to have a high opinion of him too.

But Feed was not paying any heed to Iwama's attitude, and instead was busily flipping through the materials in his hands.

"The records he left in the online database that I manage is the proof. The time that the incident at Jusho high took place was..."

"In Japanese time, it was July 13th, sometime between 10 and 12 AM," Narukawa, who was driving, interjected in an emotionless voice.

"At precisely that time, Nakajima was trying to talk to the AI, Craft, located on my servers in Arkham in Massachusetts."

"What!? If you had such critical information why didn't you tell us before...No, I'm sorry, pardon the outburst. I presume you will be releasing that information to us?"

"I'm here precisely because that information is not something that can be so easily released." Feed's voice was calm and composed.

"But this is an investigation..." As Iwama reflexively leaned ahead, the car suddenly slowed down, and he fell forward. The black Cadillac pulled in front of the gate of Jusho High.

Iwama entered the CAI room accompanied by Narukawa and Feed, grimaced at the heat and stench in the room, and explained the situation when the incident there had occurred.

"So then, you haven't been able to identify this matter yet?" Gathering some of the sticky substance sticking to some of the rubble into a petri dish with well-practiced movements, Feed questioned the detective.

"Unfortunately, not yet..." Iwama's face was sullen.

At that moment, a small sound from a transmitter rang from Narukawa's arm.

"Looks like I've got a message from HQ. Excuse me for a moment." As usual, Narukawa showed no waste in his movement. The face of the instructor in charge of the CAI room peered out from the machine room.

"I've readied the Host Computer. Please come this way." The air conditioner turned on, and cool air finally started blowing through the sauna-like room.

"Your machines are IBMs, I see." Feed started analyzing the contents of the programs on the host computer with the speed of one very familiar with their operation. As his bony fingers tapped the keys, a huge program list filled the screen.

"MATHEMATICS 1.' That's not what I want!" A red mark was appended to the program he was analyzing.

Come to think of it, we probably should have checked the contents of the computer... While looking at Feed, absorbed in his work on the computer, with a sidelong glance, Iwama secretly regretted not having done so earlier.

"ENGLISH READER 2.' That's not what I want either!"

Feed's eyes continued to dart through the program list like a hawk, until he finally lowered his shoulders with a sigh.

"Maybe the program I want to see isn't here. It may have been tacked onto the OS itself. Could I have a look at this system's operating manual?"

"If you need the manual, we keep it in the Teacher's Office..." The teacher in charge of the CAI room looked perplexed.

"Wait. Hold on a minute here..." Apparently discovering something he had overlooked, Feed cast an uneasy glance toward the teacher and Iwama.

"Nobody has touched this system since the incident, right?" Feed said in a skeptical tone.

"As a matter of proper police procedure, we have placed this room off-limits..." Not being able to directly answer Feed's question, Iwama looked at the teacher in an accusatory manner.

Right at that moment, Narukawa, who had come in at some point, handed Feed a memo.

"Nakajima has returned."

The moment his eyes read the scrap of paper, Feed's expression lit up.

Part 1: Chapter 7

While Feed was at Jusho High, a man from the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office calling himself Saga was visiting Nakajima's high-rise apartment building in Suginami Ward. He was impeccably dressed and his speech and mannerisms were those of a gentleman. But Nakajima's mother, who responded to the door, had never even heard of any organization called the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office before. From the man's appearance, it appeared that this organization held a lot more power than just the police. How did these people have any connection with her son, Akemi?

"Ma'am, we really need your assistance in our investigation. For Akemi's sake, too..."

Nakajima's mother had not heard anything from her son about what happened to him at Jusho High that day. But since that day when he practically materialized from thin air in their living room, she sensed in a warmth in Nakajima's eyes that was not there before. They were kind eyes, full of a kindness that looked to her for aid and yet was there to protect her as well. He hadn't said anything; instead he just sat there with her after he appeared, deep in thought about something. She had tried hard to suppress her urge to ask him what had happened to him while he had gone missing. For some reason, she got the sense that Akemi would go far away again if she did. Finally, as if he had gotten his thoughts together, Akemi had stood up and shut himself up in his room, falling into a deep sleep as soon as his head hit his pillow. But that was enough for his mother. Her own mother's intuition told her that he had been through something terrible in that short week he was gone.

I don't know what happened to him. But at the very least, Akemi didn't abandon me. Nakajima's mother felt a new love for her son from the bottom of her heart.

I won't let anyone threaten Akemi, regardless of who they are!

Not knowing what to do in the face of this woman's harsh stare, the man calling himself Saga fished in his shirt pocket for a carton of cigarettes.

"I'm sorry, but could you lend me an ashtray?"

The moment he opened his mouth, the doorbell rang. Nakajima's mother immediately stood up and picked up the intercom hanging on the wall.

"...Yes. Your colleague just arrived. Hold on a minute, I'll let you in."

Pursing her lips together as if coming to a decision, she headed toward the foyer. Smiling bitterly, the man returned his cigarette to its box and followed after her.

Part Two: Quickening

Part 2: Chapter 1

Situated between Musashino city in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area and Mitaka city is a 6600-square-meter wooded area of mixed tree types called the Soga Forest. Thickly overgrown with ancient larch and beech trees growing in irregular patterns, this forest is a good place for children to play during the day.

However, the children who play in these woods never go near the swamp filled with dark green reeds and other water plants that is located in a corner of the forest. But this is not only because their parents strictly forbid them from any sort of risky playing in the water. The eerie aura given off by the delapidated old western-style house that was there enveloped the entire swamp itself, scaring off everyone who dared come near.

The house originally belonged to a former elite-turned-war criminal from the Second World War, and misfortune befell all who owned it thereafter. Since the last family that had lived there had been brutally slaughtered by robbers, it had been left untouched, with nobody daring to move in.

It was most likely that Isma's heightened sensitivity as a magician had caused him to pick this manor from among the places Shimazaki had proposed as a place to summon the demon.

The cool concrete walls of the underground storage room were completely exposed. A faint, strange smell wafted from one corner. The fluorescent lamp in the ceiling illuminated the not-yet-dry reddish-black paint of the bizarre symbol painted on the ground. It was mysterious geometric pattern, much like an abstract depiction of a bird's eye. In its center stood a large computer. From the computer extended a five-meter-long cable, connecting to a keyboard and display in the middle of a Solomon Hexagram.

"The preparations for the summoning of Set are complete..." Isma's frigid voice echoed off the concrete walls as he faced the screen. Shortly earlier, that screen had been displaying pictographs that looked like Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Shimazaki, who was standing in a corner of the Solomon Hexagram, licked his lips and peered into the display, his eyes full of both expectation and uneasiness at the same time.

Isma's bony fingers started tapping the keys. The hard disk gave off a whine as it started slowly spinning, and an unintelligible pattern started flashing onscreen. Soon the screen went black, and after an instant of silence, an earthquake rumbled, shaking the very foundations of the manor. Shimazaki's eyes darted about the room in terror, but Isma showed no signs of paying him any heed.

"He is here!" As Isma cried out, the floor around the computer started to crack and brilliant

light shone out of the tiny fissures. A miasma started seeping out of the cracks, but the inside of the Solomon Hexagram was protected from being affected.

Presently, a writhing, hoarse voice spilled from the speakers.

"Who calls me?"

"I am thy romet, Isma Feed."

"I do not know that name." The voice, sounding as if it echoed from the bowels of Hell, terrified Shimazaki, who dropped to the floor in fear, cowering behind Isma's chair. Cruelly pushing his hands away, Isma stood up, as if in defiance of the display.

"Know that I plan to join forces with thee, child of Nut, and conquer the Assiah world."

"..."

For some time, silence filled the room.

The hard disk started spinning furiously, indicating that it was handling a huge amount of data. Then the low voice echoed through the room again.

"What do you offer me?"

"Anything thou desirest. However, only if thou lendst me thy power."

"Do you, a mere human, dare to consider yourself my equal?"

"Indeed I do. There is none other than I that can call thee into the Assiah world."

"How impudent..."

As the air around the computer started shimmering as if in a heat haze, a blistering wave assaulted Isma. Before the immense might of that wave of anger, even Isma took a step backwards. The iron girders holding up the ceiling bent like a bow, and the fluorescent tubes of the lights shattered and fell to the floor as dust. Shimazaki fell on his stomach to the floor, his hands over his head as if to protect it. But Isma showed no fear of the computer and simply kept glaring at it.

"Set, dost thou think that I do not know just how much thy desirest the Assiah world?" At the sound of his soft voice, the fierce wind died down.

"Thy legends still are known to this day--how thou killed thy elder brother Osiris, how thy turned all the other gods led by Horus against thee, and how thy fought them all and survived--all in order to make the Assiah world thy own."

"So what is it what you want to say...?" There was some hesitation in Set's voice.

"I have the technology to break the laws that bind thee and thy kind. Joining forces with me would be greatly beneficial to thee as well, would it not?"

"Isma, or whoever it is you are, I vow in the name of Nut to form a contract with you." Set's voice reverberated throughout the room.

For a demon to vow in the name of one ranking above itself indicated an absolute, unbreakable bond. Isma's face lit up with a victorious smile.

"Set, tell me what it is thou wishest."

"Do you vow not to join forces with any demon than I?"

"Very well. If thou vowest to Nut not to join forces with any human other than I."

The demon Set and Isma started to go into the details of forming a concrete contract.

Part 2: Chapter 2

After returning to the material world from Izanami's burial chamber, Nakajima had visibly weakened, and under the protection of the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, he had been admitted to Kuniritsu-Musashino Hospital, where Charles Feed had questioned him.

"I think that just about covers all that happened, Dr. Feed." Sitting up in bed, Nakajima spoke in a tired voice before going silent. His face was as handsome as usual, but his gaze seemed somewhat empty.

Sitting across from Nakajima, Feed got a sense of what was going on. *Part of his psyche is refusing to awaken. He probably doesn't want to face the fact that the demon he summoned killed all of his classmates.*

"I don't really know what to say...if only I was in America when you first summoned the demon and contacted Craft, this never would have happened. However, that doesn't change the fact that you have committed a grave crime. Whether or not the law can do anything about it, though..." Feed looked over at Narukawa, who was sitting in a corner of the room, listening intently.

"It's be tough to establish any proof of instigation of murder. About all he could be charged with is misuse of a computer."

Caught by Feed's gaze as he looked at Nakajima's profile, Narukawa gave a somewhat forced legal interpretation of the situation.

Something seemed strange about Nakajima; Narukawa felt a strange sense, like as if he had run into a lover or long-lost relative that he had been separated from ages ago. At first he thought that he had just been stricken by the boy's looks, but as time passed, he realized that this was something different, like an bizarrely unnatural feeling of nostalgia.

I can't put my finger on it, but I'm sure I've met this boy somewhere...

However, no matter how hard he racked his brains, Narukawa could not think of another moment where had ever seen Nakajima before.

"I would never have expected a genius capable of summoning demons with a computer would be born here in Japan..." Feed's murmuring broke Narukawa's strange sense of déjà-vu.

"I think it's less a matter of my ability and more that the conditions in the city of Tokyo are good for summoning demons. I'm sure there are many programs written on the same concept overseas, but I've never heard of an example of any of them working." Nakajima's words were cool and collected, as if he was speaking of someone else.

"On that note, where is the critical demon summoning program now?"

"It should be on Jusho High's host computer..."

"What was the filename?"

"It's DEMON."

Feed and Narukawa looked at each other. Nakajima understood the meaning of their glance instantly.

"Someone deleted it, didn't they?"

"Who besides you would have been able to do that?"

"Ohara, I bet."

As Nakajima responded, Narukawa interrupted into the conversation.

"I will get right on finding Ohara. I'm not saying that I believe everything that Nakajima is saying, but it definitely seems that Ohara holds the key to this puzzle."

Almost as if switching places with Narukawa as he opened the door to the room, Nakajima's mother looked in.

"Mr. Feed, it's been longer than an hour. Akemi is still not well. Could I possibly ask you to come back some other time?"

Feed shook his head and spoke resolutely. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Nakajima, but for your own son's sake, it's important that I finish my conversation with him."

"Mom, it's OK." With her son's insistence, Nakajima's mother left with an air of disapproval, but even after she left, her silhouette in the frosted glass showed that she was trying to listen in on the conversation.

Smiling bitterly, Feed spoke in a low voice directly into Nakajima's ear.

"You'll work together with me, right?"

"Yes...of course."

"So, where do you think we should start from?"

"...Hmm. I think the best thing to do to start would be to rewrite the demon summoning program." As Nakajima whispered, there was a sort of blankness in his expression.

Part 2: Chapter 3

August 1st, midnight.

The underground storage room seemed somewhat small now, with the huge supercomputer that had now been installed there. Isma had been making large improvements in the demon summoning program that Ohara had stolen. Of course, he also had the skills of the software engineers under Shimazaki's control at his beck and call. Still, materializing the "digital" Set had proved to be more difficult than expected.

"Saint, how is it going? Has there been any progress?" Shimazaki's voice sounded somewhat impatient.

"This program is has too many defects in it! Summoning a demon is a two step process; first you need to create a magnetic field in which to call it forth, and then you can help give it a form. However this program completes the process in a confusing and complicated way!"

"But wasn't the demon called Loki able to take a body using that program?"

"Set is a lot more powerful than Loki. The amount of data that needs to be processed is gigantic in comparison. Furthermore, if you try to run the program straight-up, low-ranking demons get their data mixed up with Set, making it even more difficult to give him a form. I'm trying to add my own improvements to handle the data more efficiently, but it's not enough to give Set a body yet. Anyhow, to start with, I'm going to try to separate and materialize those low-ranking demons first."

Sitting in the middle of the Solomon Hexagram, Isma started to type on the keyboard. The magnetic tape started clacking as the reels began to spin, and the display started flashing wildly. Soon, a musky smell filled the room.

"Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh." As the low voice sounded, a milky white droplet formed on the display.

"Oh, at last!" Not moving an inch, Isma and Shimazaki gazed at the screen. As the condensation increased until it seemed to cover the screen, it slid off onto the floor. Two tiny white snakes, small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand, started to slither across the ground. As Shimazaki started to bend toward them, an expression of suspicion on his face, Isma yelled at him.

"Don't get near them! If you value your life, that is!"

"What are these puny little snakes?" Shimazaki asked, clear dissatisfaction in his voice.

"They are Apeps, venomous serpents that serve Set."

"What kind of power could little snakes like these possibly have?"

"Apeps enter into the bodies of humans, dissolve their spinal cords with their poison and then replace it with their own bodies, becoming the victim's nervous system and controlling

them completely."

"I-is that so...?" Shimazaki gulped and took a step backward.

"Apeps are like receivers that Set can use to control humans from a long distance. Depending on how one used them, they could be more useful than any kind of raw power, no matter how great..." His eyes mere slits, as if looking at precious jewels, Isma watched the two small squiggling vipers.

On the second floor of the same manor, Ohara was in a room about 15 square meters with no other furniture but a bed. Opening the curtains of the window, she saw the moon reflected in the water amongst the reeds of the swamp. Facing the moon, Ohara whispered.

"Loki..."

Ohara had no home to return to. According to the report from one of Shimazaki's underlings, they were investigating her house in connection with the incident at Jusho high.

Nobody knows the truth. No, even if someone told them, they'd never believe it.

As if in response to her call, the embryo inside her moved around.

Does a fetus less than three months old like this usually kick this much? I might be giving birth to a child with an unfathomable amount of power. Since it's Loki's child, I'm sure it'll be beautiful....

Closing the curtains and moving away from the window, Ohara sat down on the bed. Sitting alone at night like this always made her thoughts turn to Loki.

It's hard to believe that just a few months ago I was hoping to get married like a normal person. Loki, where did you go...

Her intuition told her that the demon she loved was dead. However, she did not want to admit it. She couldn't possibly believe that anyone in the world could replace Loki.

Nakajima, Shirasagi, if you still live, I'll make you suffer just like I have!

Ohara bit her lip until it bled. Though she had not noticed when it happened, green scales had started to grow on the back of her hand. At some point, demonic power had started to flow through Ohara's own body.

Part 2: Chapter 4

Sandwiched in between many computers and electronic instruments, a whiteboard covered in complicated looking mathematical formulae dominated a room in the brand new National Electric Research Laboratories (otherwise known as Electric Labs) building behind Shinjuku Park in Tokyo. Surrounding a desk with a terminal around it, a crimson thaumaturgic circle painted on the ground stood out conspicuously. This was the Demon Banishment Project Room, constructed by Professor Feed on direct request to the Chief Cabinet Secretary. Of course, there was no way that they could officially name the project something like "Demon Banishment," and a placard attached to the door read "New AI Project Room," AI short for "Artificial Intelligence."

A week earlier, late at night, Feed visited Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujita along with Narukawa and the fully-recovered Nakajima. While skirting around Nakajima's own personal culpability in the incident, Feed had explained the details situation to the Secretary--how Nakajima fought with a demon summoned by a computer, and how the incident posed a potential danger for the future.

However, Secretary Fujita's response had been less than accomodating.

"Even coming from a brilliant scientist from MIT as yourself, I can't possibly be expected to believe in demons." Behind his glasses, Fujita's eyes displayed an expression of surprise and confusion.

"Well, at the very least, there are plenty of people in the US government that believe in that possibility." Feed shrugged his shoulders.

"We're low on help already, and I've already appointed our most elite investigator to help you..." Fujita spoke sardonically, barely concealing his irritation.

Narukawa, who had remained silent listening until this point in the conversation, suddenly spoke.

"Nakajima, could you show us Kerberos?"

"Of course."

With deft movements, Nakajima pulled out his handheld computer and his fingers started flying across the keyboard. Fujita's feet, which had been tapping impatiently, stopped instantly as a strange mist started billowing forth from the liquid crystal display. Rapidly the mist condensed into the outline of an otherworldly beast. As a gut-wrenching roar shook the office, Fujita found himself staring into two eyes like flame.

"What is...!?"

"This is a demon, Secretary Fujita. Though this demon is an obedient one, fiercely loyal to his master Nakajima."

Shaken by Kerberos' roar, Fujita waved his hand as if trying to say "OK, I get it!"

The first job of the Demon Banishment Project was to recreate the Demon Summoning Program that had been deleted off of Jusho High's host computer by someone. That itself was easy for Nakajima. Several days later, as Nakajima was going through the nearly complete program line-by-line to check it, Feed called out from behind him.

"How is it compared to the old version?"

"Part of the machine-language subroutines might be different, but for the most part, it should be the same." Nakajima's voice was slightly downcast. It might have been that deep down he no longer wanted to have any more association with demons at all.

"Want to give it a shot?" Stepping into the red thaumaturgic circle painted on the ground with mercuric sulfide-based paint, Feed spoke casually.

"OK."

As the computer started up, a musky odor started to fill the room. A low rumbling filled the brand new building, and cracks shot up the white walls.

"If a demon appears, I'll take care of it." In his right hand, Feed was gripping an ornate cross. Realizing the man's sincerity, Nakajima cast a genuinely friendly smile in his direction for the first time. But the rumbling started to die down, and the musky smell started to thin.

"Is there some sort of mistake in the program?" Nakajima looked at Feed as if searching for an answer.

"I don't think so. From what I've just seen, there's no mistake that a magnetic field suitable for summoning a demon was all set up. It may be that the reason no demon appeared was that it might have appeared in the Assiah world via a different magnetic field."

"There's still some details about the mechanism for demon summoning that I don't really understand yet."

"Unusual words, coming from the genius that was the first to successfully summon a demon via a computer." Feed grinned broadly, but his expression soon turned grave as he looked directly at Nakajima.

"The last demon to appear called himself Set, correct?"

"Yes, that's right."

"While it's too dangerous to try and conjecture the state of affairs in the demon world based on our own knowledge of this one, my theory is that the demon world is like a colloidal conglomeration of countless mini-universes, each centered around a powerful demon. Most likely, with Loki's death, the mini-universe in contact with Japan or Tokyo vanished, and Set's mini-universe entered to take its place. Demon summoning is just opening a contact point between the two worlds at the same time."

"So what would happen if two contact points were opened at the same time?"

"The demon would decide which it wanted to appear at. However, there are some examples in medieval records of demon summonings that report that when the difference in strength of the two magnetic fields was great enough, the demon would be pulled to the stronger field, regardless of which it wanted to go to..."

A knock on the door interrupted Feed's explanation. Carrying a stack of thick books, Narukawa closed the door behind him as he approached the two.

"There are about 6,000 computers in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area capable of summoning a demon. Using mass numbers of investigators, this is the number of locations that could be searched out in detail within a month."

Since the project was officially started, while continuing to try and track down Ohara, Narukawa had been investigating places with mid-size or larger computers installed, with an eye out for hardware that would be capable of summoning demons.

"I see. Have you made any headway on finding Ohara?"

"Unfortunately, no. However, there is something I'd like to ask you..." Lowering his voice, Narukawa looked at Feed.

"What is it?"

"Professor, do you know a man named Isma Feed?"

The instant the professor heard the name, Nakajima noticed his expression cloud up.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"We've received a communique from the FBI that Isma has snuck into Japan."

"This is bad. As you know, in the incarnation of a serpent, Set was powerful enough to take on and fight all the Egyptian gods to a standstill single-handedly. If Isma were to join forces with one such as him..."

Without explaining just who Isma was, Feed turned to the window and gazed outside with unfocused eyes.

Part 2: Chapter 5

On the second floor of the eight-story building next to the official residence of the Nagatacho Council Chairman was the office of one Ota Masaru, Chief Secretary of the Liberal Party. Though it was past one o'clock in the morning, Ota sat on his bed in his private room beyond the office, gripping the receiver of the phone as he had been for over an hour. He had been losing a lot of sleep over whether or not the National Secrets Protection Act was going to pass or not. His bulldog-like jowled face was thick with signs of accumulated fatigue.

"You yourself advocated the importance of passing the National Secrets Protection Act; it would be a waste for you change your mind about it now!" Ota's voice sounded a little rude.

"Now that Committee Chairman Matoba is against the act, I can't go along with it. Try and understand the tight position that I'm in right now." The voice on the other end of the phone was also tired. Judging from the fact that he brought up Committee Chairman Matoba, the speaker was probably a member of the Diet from the Social Democratic Party.

"I've done my best to convince Matoba. If that's not enough, then the only thing left for you to is to try and convince him yourself. I'm sure Matoba is not unflappable, so long as you agree to a power share between the two parties." Saying all he was willing to, the speaker hung up.

"Damn!" Slamming the receiver back onto the phone, Ota fell backwards onto the bed and rubbed his eyelids. Taking in a deep breath, his bulging stomach expanded like a frog's.

Right at that moment, there was a knock on the door.

"It's open." Yawning as he spoke, Ota made no effort to turn toward the door. It made a clicking sound as it opened, and a red face with a clearly ingratiating smile poked in through the door.

It was Shimazaki Ryunosuke.

"I don't know what it is you want at this hour, but I'm not exactly in a good mood." Propping himself up on the bed, Ota turned his head toward the man, the bones in his neck popping as he did so.

"There's something that I would like to tell you." Shimazaki's eyes were lit up.

"I'd love to hear another one of your schemes to make more money, but this isn't the time. I've got to get this law passed."

"Trying to score as many points as possible while Chief Secretary so you can be first in line for that juicy Party Chairman position when it next goes vacant, are we?"

"Hmph!" Ota glared at Shimazaki with displeasure in his bulging eyes. But he didn't show any reaction to the man.

"You have nothing to worry about. After all, Committee Chairman Matoba of the Social

Democratic Party is going to switch sides and start supporting the National Secrets Protection Act."

"What did you just say...!?"

Ota bolted upright, and as if to taunt him, Shimazaki remained silent for a while.

"I'm saying that if you leave everything to me, I'll get the Social Democratic Party on your side."

"If this is a joke, it's not very funny. Do you have some sort of plan?" Ota's voice was trembling.

Part 2: Chapter 6

The long-term Committee Chairman Matoba of the Social Democratic Party lived in a manor in a residential area about a ten minute walk away from Ikegami Honmonji. The modern, reinforced concrete building behind the vine-covered gateposts stood in stark contrast to the traditional Japanese-style buildings all around it.

While Shimazaki was paying a visit to Ota, a tall man carrying what looked like a slim suitcase stepped out of a black Cedric parked near that gatepost. The man was in excellent shape, but his behavior seemed somehow agitated and anxious. Stepping into the alleyway and slipping behind Matoba's manor, he opened the lid of the suitcase.

Apparently that suitcase was actually a notebook computer.

Typing on the keyboard with uncertain movements, a droplet-like crystal blurred the liquid-crystal display of the machine. Presently the crystal changed into a milky-white liquid, which spilled to the ground by the man's feet and took on the form of an Apep, the minion of Set. Raising its slender head, the Apep took a quick look around before silently disappearing inside the concrete mansion.

Right at that moment, Matoba was taking a nap on the sofabed in the study next to his office. The heavy black bags under his eyes belied his exhaustion, most likely from his nonstop efforts to bring his party together and block the National Secrets Protection Act from being passed. Taking advantage of the fact that the world stage was more and more becoming becoming a war of information, the restrictions in the act clearly indicated that the Liberal Party was veering even further and further to the right. As the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, that was hard for Matoba to let slide.

A quiet breeze blew into the room through the air conditioner that Matoba had left on. Not even disturbing the sound of that breeze, the snake slipped into the room through the slit under the door. It raised up its head, as if fixating on its prey. Its small red eyes looked all over the slightly snoring, sleeping form of Matoba. Squiggling its body rapidly, the white snake slithered across the floor, effortlessly climbing up the sofabed and diving into the V-neck of Matoba's undershirt, clearly exposed by his unfastened tie.

The next instant, without any hesitation, the pale serpent bit into the exaggeratedly expanding and contracting fat stomach before it. Like a sharp drill, the slender body of the snake tunneled into Matoba's gut. As if he felt no pain whatsoever, Matoba kept sleeping on peacefully.

A minute or so later, Matoba suddenly twisted up away from the sofabed as if a wave of high-voltage electricity was running through him, and his body started to spasm wildly.

However, it appeared that the Apep had gained full control of his nervous system, as he soon started snoring again and fell into a deep sleep. Strangely enough, the wound on his stomach had sealed up as if cured by some sort of magic medicine. Only moments later, the light sound of a Cedric driving away could be heard moving away from the front of Matoba's manor.

The next morning, Ota, who had been sleeping like a rock in his office in Nagatacho, was shaken awake by a messenger.

"Is it time for today's plenary session already?" As Ota's sleepy eyes searched for his glasses, the messenger's excited voice interrupted.

"Chairman Matoba of the Social Democratic Party declared his support for the National Secrets Protection Act in a press conference this morning. Congratulations, Chief Secretary. Now the law is as good as passed."

"What!?" As if he had not completely awakened from a dream, Ota shook his head furiously.

Part Three: Set Summoned

Part 3: Chapter 1

The air conditioners in the basement of the manor hummed at full blast, drawing in the air from the Soga Forest, damp from the previous day's rain, and drenching the room with thick humidity. Focused entirely on his work at the keyboard, Isma heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and turned around in irritation. Shimazaki entered the room, his yellow teeth drawn in a wide grin.

"The Apeps are working splendidly."

"Of course they are. But don't forget--any body the Apeps possess won't last ten days."

Brushing aside Isma's warning, Yamazaki continued speaking. "You know, the Chief Secretary of the Liberal Party says he would like to meet you..."

"I have no interest in petty Japanese politicians."

Isma's words left Shimazaki at a loss. He simply smiled ingratiatingly, but not discouraged, walked behind Isma to take a look at the computer display.

"What are you doing now?"

"Though I have succeeded in giving form to Set's Apeps, this is just the beginning. Until I can manage to give Set himself a body, it will be impossible to truly conquer the Assiah world."

"You certainly have set your sights high, Saint. Oh, by the way..." Lowering his voice, Shimazaki pulled a nearby chair up and sit down next to Isma.

"Nakajima has apparently returned."

Isma stopped typing on the keyboard.

"So this means he really did defeat Loki."

"Most likely. On that note, there's something in the information I got about him that has been bothering me..." Shimazaki moved even closer to Isma.

"I've heard rumors that a man named Charles Feed has joined with Nakajima and is working with him to develop a plan to fight back against the demons. Who is he?"

"He's my brother." Speaking in an emotionless voice, Feed started typing again.

"Oh. Well, that's a strange coincidence..." Shimazaki had found that much out for himself long ago, but pretended that he had not known.

"In any case, I would like your advice on how to deal with the current situation."

As Shimazaki spoke, Isma lifted his bony fingers away from the keyboard and slowly looked up.

"Send Ohara after him."

"Eh?" Not understanding what Isma meant, Shimazaki stood with a look of puzzlement on his face.

Isma chuckled and spoke in a cold and ruthless voice. "While it is best to dispose of any liabilities, I would like to get a sense of their abilities first. At the moment, Ohara is showing signs of demonization. She is also very disposable, making her ideal to test their power. Wouldn't you agree?"

Part 3: Chapter 2

Meanwhile, Yumiko was learning to control her own power from Izanami, the goddess having brought her into Yomi. Though she lived the life of an ordinary girl for seventeen years, Yumiko had inherited the constitution of Izanami. That, along with the adept instruction from the goddess herself, had allowed Yumiko to learn to draw out the bottomless power slumbering deep within her, bit by bit, in a very short time span.

She was currently in the middle of training to harness the psychic power once held by the ancient gods. With just a space of two meters between them, two rock walls, nearly perpendicular to the ground, faced each other, towering up into the sky. Yumiko was floating in mid-air, as if weaving through that gap. Her white skin began to glow more and more with a purple phosphorescent glow. With a boom like thunder, the glow increased in intensity. Yumiko, enveloped in that mysterious light and surrounded by a golden aura behind her, resembled the smiling visage of the Miroku Buddha. Soon, as if she had transformed into a particle of light herself, the outline of her shape started to blur and become indistinct.

Silently, Yumiko raised her right hand. The clouds of light surrounding her body started to condense at the tip of her finger. Yumiko brought down her arm forcefully. As she did, the light fired from her finger shot like an arrow through the rock face.

An immense roar echoed, and a brilliant blue pillar of flame flared into the sky. Yumiko watched the giant rock with an almost drunken expression in her eyes as it slowly crumbled into nothing, as if in a slow-motion video. But as if Yumiko sensed something, suddenly her eyes clouded up, and she started plunging toward the ground some twenty meters below like a bird whose wings had been pulled off.

"Look out!"

Mere moments before Yumiko would have struck the ground, an invisible power picked her up and brought her slowly to the ground like a leisurely falling feather.

"What's the matter with you!?" Izanami, who was kneeling next to Yumiko, spoke harshly.

"If this is the best you can do, I can't imagine when I'll be able to send you back to the human world..."

The goddess realized that Yumiko's eyes were trembling as if in terror, and softened her tone.

"You saw something, didn't you?"

"Yes. Someone close to me crying out, and the smell of blood..." Yumiko replied in a broken voice, her pale lips trembling, drained of blood.

"Was it Nakajima's voice?"

"No....it was my mother's voice."

Yumiko looked up into the sky anxiously. Other than the sound of the wind blowing through the valley, all was silent. But Yumiko was sure that she had heard her mother scream.

"Izanami, could something terrible have happened to my mother?" Yumiko's voice was full of emotion.

Yumiko might have foreseen something in the future. However, there was also the possibility that her desire to return to the human world was unconsciously causing her to hallucinate. Izanami had trouble deciding whether or not she should return her charge to the human world.

With Izanami's direct instruction, Yumiko had gained mastery of psychic powers well enough to face off against demons on her own. But her mind was still that of a seventeen-year-old schoolgirl. Like what had happened today, if her determination wavered, it could have disastrous consequences. Furthermore, Yumiko was relying too much on her sense of sight when using her powers.

Still, her immaturity is not a problem that can be solved with just a little bit of short training. This girl's desire to return to Nakajima is clouding her judgement. If she was with him, it might actually help fix her shortcomings instead.

"Do you want to return to the human world?" Izanami smiled kindly at Yumiko.

Part 3: Chapter 3

Dressed in a colorful chinese-style one-piece, a woman walked briskly from West Eifuku station on the Inokashira line, following a path that ran along the train tracks. Her dark brown eyes shined with a ghostly light in the darkness, accentuating her beauty. Soon the woman stopped in front of a low-rise building covered in white tiles. The name "Sanzhi Electric Residences" was etched into the plate on the entrance to the building. Though it was a corporate dormitory, it was very well maintained and was on the scale of a high-class apartment building. Warm lights coming from various windows on the three-story building and the soft sound of air conditioner compressors reflected the calm and relaxation of the tenants within.

The woman glared with malice at a corner of the top floor of the building.

Shirasagi Yumiko, just you watch. I'm going to slaughter your whole family.

Ohara's eyes glowed with a green aura, revealing the demonic power within her. She recalled how Yumiko injured her beloved Loki in the CAI room. Though Yumiko was really possessed by Izanami when she had fought Loki, to Ohara it was all the same.

If something has happened to Loki, it's Yumiko's fault--there's no other way to look at it.

Ohara's hatred for Yumiko far surpassed that of hers for Nakajima. Though Isma had instructed her to kill Nakajima, Ohara suggested that she it would be best to first draw him out by attacking Yumiko's family instead; though the plan had merit it was Ohara's hatred for Yumiko that was really behind her proposal.

Trying to calm her emotions, Ohara closed her eyelids. Soon, the grim expression on her face disappeared, to be replaced by a smile. Taking in a deep breath, she started to climb the stairs.

Right as the doorbell echoed for the second time, the door opened slightly, locked with a chain, bathing the concrete pathway outside with light. A woman looked through the crack with suspicion at this late-night visitor.

"My name is Harayama, and I'm from Jusho High. About Yumiko..." Ohara could not risk using her real name.

The door closed for a moment, and then with the sound of the chain being unfastened, it opened wiedy. A plump middle-aged woman stood in front of Ohara, looking up at her with eagerness in her eyes.

"Thank you for taking the trouble to come out here in the middle of the night...have you learned anything new?" The woman hardly resembled Yumiko; her double-eyelids were about

the only feature the two shared. Her barely 150-centimeter height and plump frame made her look jovial and pleasant. For an instant, Ohara's hostility was dulled.

"Don't just stand out there! Come on in!" The voice seemed to come further in, from the living room, but then a handsome man with silvery-gray hair looked around the corner. The instant Ohara saw the man, she saw the resemblance to Yumiko in his good looks, igniting the flames of hatred within her. She felt the scales under her thick makeup hardening.

"I'm sorry, I just got over-excited. Please, come in." Motioning for Ohara to come inside, Yumiko's mother locked the door. The man was returning to the living room when he heard a strange sound from the foyer, and turned around.

The visitor was facing away from him, crouching as if to maybe take off her shoes, and his wife was staring at her with shock in her eyes.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

But instead of answering her husband, the woman simply gaped and spurted blood from the deep wound in her throat.

"Heh, heh, heh."

The woman facing away from him started chuckling. Yumiko's father watched as his wife, her throat rent in two, slowly collapsed to the floor of the foyer, now a sea of blood, with a look of disbelief on her face.

"Gah hah hah hah!" The woman's laugh rose to a cackle.

"Y-You bastard...!" The man gradually realized the seriousness of the situation.

However, the woman slowly stood up and turned around, and the visage of her face froze Yumiko's father in his tracks. Her bronze face was framed by black hair, her crimson mouth slightly open, her silver eyes glittering with madness, looking him over. Ohara herself was taken aback by the force of her transformation. However, she was partially drunk with the mysterious power she had gained with Loki's blood running through her veins. Her hands, coated in purple scales, grabbed onto the man's throat, and she effortlessly lifted him in the air.

The man's face started to turn purple. However, his primal survival instinct was not dead, and like a shrimp, his body shook, his legs kicking.

Murmuring, Ohara squeezed tighter. "That's right, struggle. Struggle as hard and as vainly as you can."

"Guagh!" With a bizarre voice that could only come from a larynx being clamped shut, the man's body spasmed and went limp.

At that moment, the doorbell echoed throughout the apartment. Most likely, Yumiko's younger brother had come home. Licking the black blood off her razor-sharp talons, Ohara smiled at the fortuitous timing of the arrival.

Part 3: Chapter 4

On the evening of the following day, Nakajima's mother was getting irritated at how late her son was returning.

Even if he is helping with the investigation, I can't imagine they would need his help this much...

She looked up at the clock; it was already long past eight o'clock. Recently Nakajima had been spending long amounts of time with Feed. This was to be expected; without him, there was no chance of the Demon Banishment Project ever coming to fruition. But Nakajima's mother had no way of knowing the truth behind the situation. MIT's Professor Charles Feed showing up. The Special Forces-like Cabinet Intelligence Office getting involved. All of the signs pointed to her son being embroiled in some sort of grave and important affair. Even though her primary concern was for her son to do well in his college entrance exams coming up the following spring, she was in no position to bother him about such a trifling affair.

"I'm sure that at MIT, Akemi will be able to do research that will benefit the whole world. Please let me make arrangements for his matriculation." If not for Professor Feed's request, which sounded at least half-serious, right about now there might have been a great rift between her and her son.

The doorbell rang.

"He's finally back."

But the slightly nasal voice from the intercom claimed to be a guidance counselor from Jusho High. Looking at the mirror and fixing her hair slightly, Nakajima's mother opened the door. A graceful, smiling woman stood in front of her.

Is this really a teacher? I imagine none of her students would dare disobey her...

Dressed in a colorful colorful one-piece, her supple body certainly didn't seem to be what one would expect of a teacher.

"There's something I think I should talk to you about Nakajima." Ohara knew just what to say to gain her target's trust. Though slightly confused at her slightly overly-gaudy appearance, Nakajima's mother smiled politely and prepared from slippers.

"The place is a mess, but please, come in."

Ohara's expression stiffened for an instant as she watched Nakajima's mother turn around. *She looks exactly like Nakajima Akemi...*

Trying to control her cascading emotions, Ohara bit down on her lip.

Facing Nakajima's mother on the sofa, the teacher made an unexpected comment.

"My name is Ohara. I was lying when I said I was a guidance counselor, so I apologize for that."

"Eh...?" Nakajima's mother tilted her head in suspicion.

Ohara's eyes narrowed as she watched the woman across from her.

"I take it from your expression that you don't know who I am." There was an uneasy tension in the air between them.

"You really do look a lot like him." Murmuring, Ohara felt the scales on her cheeks hardening beneath her makeup.

"Have a look at this." Speaking in a restrained voice, Ohara extended her hands out toward Nakajima's mother.

"What's this...!?"

Green scales were slowly sliding out of the white skin on her hands.

"Your beloved Akemi was the one who transformed me into this." Ohara's eyes burned with a silvery flame.

"What do you mean?" Bewildered, Nakajima's mother spoke shrilly; even if she had wanted to stand up, it was as if her body was rooted to the spot and she could not move.

A tiny white snake stuck its head out of the purse that Ohara had put on the sofa. Its flat head turned and its red eyes fixated on Nakajima's mother.

Nakajima's mother bolted to her feet. "Ah!! What is this thing? Who are you...?"

The white snake swiftly slid across the ground to her feet, and deftly began to slither up her slender leg.

Part 3: Chapter 5

The same night, Yumiko returned from Yomi to her house for the first time in ages, only to be greeted by the stench of blood. She stood fixed to the spot, staring at the wet pools of blood in the foyer.

Why...who did this....

Dropping to the floor, her hands slipped in the lake of blood below them. The mangled corpses of her mother, father, and younger brother all lay before her. Perhaps she was paralyzed by the overwhelming shock of emotion, but Yumiko strangely did not shed a tear. All of a sudden, the image of a sneering woman's face appeared before her eyes.

"Ohara!" Yumiko's honed supernatural senses had picked up her mother's faint residual energy and amplified it to a clear picture.

"It was you, wasn't it, Ohara!" Yumiko's field of vision reddened, her sorrow turning to rage. When she regained her senses, she found herself walking outside.

"Yumi! When did you get back?" The housewife next door had just come up the stairs, but as she saw the blood dripping from Yumiko's hands, she dropped her shopping bag in shock.

But as if she did not even see the woman, Yumiko passed by her, walking down the stairs as if sleepwalking. Soon afterwards, she heard a piercing scream behind her. Most likely the housewife she had just passed had looked into Yumiko's apartment and seen the bloodbath there. To Yumiko, it all seemed like something that happened in a dream or a far-off world.

Why did I even come to Tokyo? If I had stayed in Sapporo none of this would ever have happened to me... Yumiko saw the roadside trees where she had been living three months earlier in Hokkaido superimposed over the lines of ginkgos in front of her.

Nakajima, if only I had never met you...

Yumiko pictured Nakajima's handsome features in her mind. Love, malice, irritation. A whirl of uncontrollable emotion surged through her body. Unable to withstand it, Yumiko squatted down along the side of the road. The minute she thought of Nakajima, tears started flowing out of her eyes uncontrollably. A nearby child looked at her suspiciously, then ran away in shock upon seeing the blood on her clothing.

I've got to find Nakajima.

With heavy footsteps, Yumiko started walking toward the one connection she had remaining.

Part 3: Chapter 6

It was past 9:00; certainly not an early time to be returning home for a high school student. As Nakajima hesitantly pressed the intercom button, the door swung open, as if waiting for him.

"Sorry I'm home so late. Professor Feed was..." Sensing a strange coldness from his mother's stare, Nakajima stopped in mid-sentence.

"This isn't the first time I've been late; why is she so mad?"

However, his mother's expression soon softened into a smile, and she pointed inside.

"There's a guest here to see you."

"To see me?" Nakajima pictured Yumiko's face.

However, the sight of a pair of high-heeled shoes in the foyer soon dispelled his hopes.

"Who is it?"

"She says her name is Ohara."

"WHAT!?" Crying out, Nakajima darted into the living room, without even taking off his shoes.

The woman sitting on the sofa with her back to him slowly stood up and turned to face him.

"It's been a while, Nakajima."

The voice was familiar. The face covered in bronze scales was not.

Nakajima felt surreal, as if he had been pulled into a nightmare, and he felt the will being sapped out of his body.

"What...are you here for!?" Nakajima finally managed to open his mouth and speak.

"I'm here to kill you, of course." Speaking casually, a crazed smile flashed on Ohara's face as she assaulted him.

With the demonic blood flowing in her veins having transformed her into a powerful demon-human hybrid, Ohara was not an opponent that Nakajima could take on barehanded. Without even showing signs of resistance, Nakajima simply let Ohara hold him down, which caused her to let her guard down slightly.

"What's wrong, Nakajima? Are you trying to suggest that I'm not worth killing!?" Sneering, Ohara's rank breath assaulted Nakajima's senses. However, he did not falter.

"I'll make you regret not using this opportunity to kill me..."

Nakajima had been picturing two blue spheres in his mind. They were spheres he had been given in Yomi, and were used to summon Hi-no-Kagutsuchi. Knocking the two spheres in his mind together, they gave off a shower of sparks, and a blistering aura surrounded his right

hand. All of a sudden, Nakajima was grasping the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, which glowed with a crimson light.

Feeling the intense heat, Ohara reflexively jumped backwards. Immediately the crimson blade came crashing down, slicing through her arm. Nakajima charged Ohara, who had been knocked backwards by the force of the blow, stabbing the sword as if to finish her off. But he had not adequately trained with the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, and Ohara escaped its tip by a hair's breadth.

That moment, Nakajima noticed his mother in his field of vision, watching their battle as if possessed.

"Mom, hide!"

Nakajima became worried; he needed to get his mother outside safely before Ohara attacked her.

"Do you want to be skewered on the sword that defeated Loki too?" Standing between his mother and Ohara, Nakajima threatened his opponent. But that once sentence reignited the dwindling flames of Ohara's desire for revenge.

"You killed Loki...!?" Holding her wounded arm, Ohara ground her teeth together and took a step back.

"The minute you let me bring out my sword, you lost. Wake up already!" There appeared to be almost a look of compassion in Nakajima's eyes, reflecting the red glow of his blade.

However, at that moment, an intense pain shot through his right arm. Of all things, his mother had stabbed him from behind with a fruit knife. Though Nakajima immediately pushed his mother away reflexively, he could not understand what had happened and just stood there confused, and in that moment, Ohara, who had slipped behind him, grabbed him in a headlock.

"Your mother has been possessed by a demon called an Apep, and is completely under my control. Letting you get killed by your own mother is the least I can do for you. Come on, do it!"

Resonding to Ohara's orders, Nakajima's mother slowly walked toward her son, brandishing her fruit knife.

"Mom, please stop!" Trying to break Ohara's grip, Nakajima cried out desperately.

Right at that time, Yumiko had arrived at Nakajima's apartment building, and was about to press the intercom when she felt a strange presence. Without hesitation, she put her hand on the doorknob and focused all her energies on it. As a noxious smoke filled the area, the expensive, high-security lock system melted, and the doorknob fell to the ground; Yumiko had used a tremendous spontaneous combustion power. Running into Nakajima's house

without taking her shoes off, Yumiko ran into the living room to see Ohara holding Nakajima in a headlock, moments before he was about to be stabbed by a silver knife.

"Nakajima, look out!"

"Wait!"

The two cried out at exactly the same.

Yumiko's eyes flashed with a blinding light for an instant, and the arms of Nakajima's knife-wielding mother burst into flame. In mere moments, the fire spread, engulfing her entire body in crimson flames, burning her to a crisp as she wailed in pain.

Meanwhile, Ohara had escaped outside via the veranda.

"Mom..." Not noticing the white snake crawling out of the conflagration before disintegrating into thin air, Nakajima merely stood agape as he watched his mother perish, wreathed in flames.

"Yumiko..."

Finally Nakajima turned around, his eyes wandering aimlessly.

"You just killed my mom..." Nakajima's strained voice tore out Yumiko's heart.

No, it can't be...

Covering her face with her hands, Yumiko ran outside.

Part 3: Chapter 7

Ohara had managed to make it back to the Soga Forest after escaping from her close shave with death; she stopped by the shores of the swamp, breathing heavily. Surrounded by dark green reeds, the surface of the water rippled, reflecting parts of the dilapidated old manor here and there. A deep wound as if cut by a scalpel was openly exposed in Ohara's arm where she had been hit by the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi. However, mysteriously enough, there was very little blood flowing from it any longer.

Ohara did not really have any intention of returning to Isma. But there was something in the Soga forest that calmed her demonic soul. Sitting down on the trunk of a fallen larch tree, she whispered to herself.

"Loki..."

I meant to get revenge, but in the end I didn't even manage to take out the one who killed Loki...

Something hot welled up in Ohara's eyes, and her bronze cheeks became moist. Waiting a little while, the night breeze cooled her well-formed face, gently wiping those tears off.

Right at that moment, the white visage of a girl clearly entered Ohara's field of vision.

It might have been the fact that only hatred had been keeping Ohara going that caused her to notice that Yumiko had half-unintentionally followed her after running out of Nakajima's house.

You just killed my mom... Nakajima's voice still echoed in Yumiko's ears. As if trying shake free from it, Yumiko slowly raised her hand, glaring at Ohara with tear-filled eyes. The psychic power bestowed upon her by Izanami would surely finish her off in a single attack.

But Yumiko faltered.

Professor Ohara is also a victim here. Nakajima's mother surely was also possessed by a demon. And I...

"Heh, heh, heh." As if she had read Yumiko's mind, Ohara sniffed her bloody fingers, suppressing a giggle.

"Foolish sympathy will destroy you. Have a look at my fingers! Some of your family's blood still remains on them!"

"Stop it!" Crying out, Yumiko closed her eyes and swung her hand.

As if following the arc of that hand, Ohara's chest was rent open, and a spray of her blood drenched the surrounding area. Yumiko unconsciously ran over and pulled up Ohara's broken body, which looked almost coiled around the larch log. In a brief moment, all traces of

scales disappeared from her face, and her ghostly white lips quivered, as if trying to say something.

But Yumiko could not hear whatever it was she was trying to say. Tears rolled off her cheeks and onto Ohara's face. All of a sudden at that instant, there was a rumbling roar from the shores of the swamp, and the entire area was steeped in a miasma.

Part 3: Chapter 8

Right at that moment, in the manor across the swamp, the magnetic tapes of the computer started spinning furiously next to Isma, who had gone without sleep or rest, analyzing data to give Set a body. The computer rejected all the commands he typed on the keyboard, and the screen started scrolling rapidly, as if a huge amount of data had gone haywire.

"What's going on!?"

Isma stood up, and the concrete under his feet tore in cracks with a terrible rending sound. Gouts of flame erupted from the cabling, and the hexagram inscribed on the floor started undulating as if it was alive. The cellar was filled with the murmurs of otherworldly voices.

"Set!"

"Set is going to be born!"

"He's finally going to be born!"

Ancient Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek...all the voices, regardless of the languages they spoke in, started blending together in a disordered cacaphony.

Born? What do they mean by born?

Isma just managed to stumble outside. There, his supernaturally heightened senses detected a demonic power far beyond anything he had ever experienced before gathering on the opposite side of the swamp.

Part 3: Chapter 9

Squelch.

As Ohara quietly drew her last breath in Yumiko's arms, there was a grisly sound of flesh rending. As Yumiko reflexively tossed Ohara's body to the ground and took a few steps backward, lukewarm bodily fluid burst out and flew into her face.

"Augh!" Feeling a stabbing pain in both her eyes, Yumiko dropped to her knees.

Hya! Hya!

A laughing voice that sound like fingers scraping on a chalkboard echoed in her ears. Sensing something inexplicably foreboding in that voice, Yumiko stood up into a ready stance. However, robbed of her sight, Yumiko could scarcely even be sure of her footing, let alone fend off an attacker.

Moments later, a huge amoeba-like writhing creature crawled out of Ohara's torn-open belly and gradually started floating in midair.

An almost unbearable stench wafted through the air. Unable to withstand it, Yumiko's knees buckled and she started coughing uncontrollably.

Hya! Hya!

Yumiko blindly fired her psychic power in the direction of the voice. But her psychic wave merely passed through the gelatinous blob, engulfing the larch tree behind it in flames.

The blob gradually floated up right above Yumiko's head, and as if it had melted all of a sudden, poured itself all over her body. Momentarily, the amoeba had Yumiko's body entirely encased in translucent jelly and two points of red light on it, clearly sentient, flickered with satisfaction.

Part Four: He Who Calls

Part 4: Chapter 1

A week passed. It was 10:00PM in Inogashira Park. Being the latter half of August, the heat during the day was as blistering as ever, but this late it was a lot easier to bear.

"Cut it out, not here!" A high-pitched nasal, entreating voice blended in with the chirping of the cicadas.

The voice of a heavily-breathing man responded. "Aw, c'mon, this is the perfect place!"

Shortly later, the woman realized that the cicadas had stopped their chirping.

"Hey, is someone watching?"

"Who cares? Let 'em peek!"

As the two continued, ignoring whether or not the insects were making any noise, a third, rapidly approaching voice sounded.

"Kerberos, make sure that Yumiko's trail hasn't split into two different directions somewhere!"

The woman looked up in surprise, and stifled a scream.

"What's the big deal all of a sudden!?" The irritated-sounding man looked around, and he too was struck speechless.

A handsome man with a bizarre, gigantic beast like a tiger was sifting through the underbrush, searching for something. It was like a scene out of a movie. The woman gulped, but after recovering from her initial shock, it was clear that she was not focused on the strange beast, but instead on the young man's good looks. Looking back and forth between him and the man currently fondling her breasts to compare the two, there was an expression of clear disappointment on her face.

Regardless of whatever happened between the couple thereafter, Nakajima gradually climbed the slope ahead of him, following Kerberos, who was cautiously walking, his muzzle was stuck out in the air as if to take in every particle of scent in the atmosphere.

"So this is where the trail ends..." Murmuring to himself, Nakajima opened the case of his handheld computer. Shortly thereafter, the demonic beast vanished as if sucked right into the small liquid crystal display.

Part 4: Chapter 2

The next morning, Nakajima and Feed were sitting in the Demon Banishment Project room, waiting for Narukawa's arrival. Lately, the role of the three men in the project had changed. Nakajima was more of a warrior than a programmer at this point. During the day he spent his time training with the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, and at night he went scouting with Kerberos to look for any traces of Yumiko. While Narukawa was working with the police to track down Ohara and Yumiko, he also was totally absorbed in tracking down computers capable of being used for demon summoning. As the operation was top-secret, it was unlikely that there would be any further help joining the project. While leading the team as a whole, Feed was immersed in writing the Demon Banishment Program.

"Nakajima, are you sure you shouldn't let your father in LA know about your mother?" Feed's reddened eyes did not leave the screen as he asked the question.

"If I did, my father would probably just come back to Japan. And he might end up as yet another casualty. In retrospect, it was foolish of me not to have thought of Yumiko's family and mine...."

Nakajima looked at Feed with an expression of conflict the likes of which he had never shown before. To him, the death of his mother was difficult to separate from his own fate; she had died at the hands of demons which he had initially called. It only reminded him all too well that he would never be safe until those demons were defeated.

Feed sighed and saved his program.

"Is it finished, Professor?"

"For the time being, yes. If you had done the programming I bet I would have finished it a lot faster." As if he was relieved regardless, Feed stretched his weary muscles.

"I think I'll be able to help in the debugging at least."

"No, that would just be a waste of time for a warrior. Don't forget about Craft; it can help in that regard." Mentioning the AI set up in Massachusetts, Feed set up his modem. He most likely was intending to send the program to Craft and have it perform the finishing touches. As Feed started communicating with Craft, Narukawa burst into the room, apologizing for being late.

"From analyzing some hair left at the scene, we were able to determine that it was Ohara that slaughtered the Shirasagi family. The police are going nuts. The missing persons incident at Jusho High hasn't even been solved yet, and now one of the missing student's families gets murdered. We currently have 1000 patrolmen searching for Ohara right now." Unable to restrain his emotion, Narukawa gave his report.

"So, have they found any leads?"

"Yes. There have been some people who spotted her, but...on the night of the murders, several witnesses reported seeing her both near Kichijoji and Ota Ward, so the search is in total disarray right now."

"I think the former is more likely. Have a look." Interrupting, Nakajima pointed at the display next to him. On screen was a map of Tokyo with several red lines drawn on it.

"I've had Kerberos try and track Yumiko's path that night. After coming to my house from her own, she headed off in the direction of Musashino." As if holding back emotion, Nakajima paused a moment.

"I think that Yumiko was chasing Ohara. And right after that, something must have happened to her..."

"But doesn't Yumiko possess great psychic power?"

"I'm sure that Ohara herself wouldn't have been any problem for her. But when you take into account Yumiko's state of mind that evening..."

Nakajima could say no more. Even though Yumiko had saved his life that night, he still held some uncontrollable resentment toward her for what she did. But considering what she must have felt when she had come to see him that night, he felt an even greater regret and affection for her. In fact, his direct participation in the Demon Banishment Project at this point was solely to find where she had gone.

"Hmm...I can't understand why anyone would have spotted her in Ota Ward. Of course, if there's some sort of organization behind all of this, I could see how false information could have gotten spread to throw us off the scent...Narukawa, is there any chance the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office could help? I know the Japanese police force is excellent, but I think they're a little out of their league here."

"Our main job is to collect information from abroad. With less than 1% of the manpower of the CIA, we can't work on collecting domestic information as well." Narukawa's response was not accommodating.

"Besides, I think it's a little bit rash to say that this is the work of an organization on some level. At the very least, just connecting the dots from what we know, it seems perfectly plausible that this was all done out of Ohara's personal grudge."

Right at that moment, the sound of a signal arriving from the modem echoed throughout the room.

"It's from Craft."

"The Demon Banishment Program is finished then?"

As if drawn in by the other two that rushed over to the main computer, Narukawa also looked at the display.

"How much with the Demon Banishment Program help?"

"If we install this program into a computer's OS, it will destroy any digital devil sent to it. At the moment, it will only work as a self-defense mechanism though."

"So what you're saying is, no demon could be summoned to a computer with this program in it?" Narukawa nodded as if he wasn't really sure whether he understood or not.

Part 4: Chapter 3

In the VIP room of the Akasaka Plaza Hotel, Ota of the Liberal Party was sitting with Shimazaki in conversation. He was in a good mood; as a result of his successful passage of an important bill, he had risen fast to become a star of his party. "I hear Chairman Matoba suffered a bizarre death--a shame, isn't it?" Set's avatars, the Apeps, could possess humans and control them however they desired. However, because of the Apeps' innate poison, those who were possessed would start to rot from within. This was how Matoba had died, though Ota had no way of knowing that.

"So, Chief Secretary, what's the deal with the New AI Project? Can it be shut down?" Shimazaki eyed Ota with displeasure.

The AI Project, of course, was the "official" name of the Demon Banishment Project.

"Right. Well, since Fujita started it up of his own accord, in theory it should be perfectly plausible to cook up some sort of trumped-up reason to shut it down, but it's being backed by the American Aide to the President. We can't just ignore that. Come on, I've already seen to it that you get all the contracts to the Capital Reconstruction Project; don't be so greedy." Watching Shimazaki like a hawk, Ota laughed heartily.

"So why are you making such a big deal about this AI project anyway? Does it interfere with your business somehow?"

"I suppose you could say that." Shimazaki lit a cigarette.

"Fujita's a tough customer. I'd prefer not to go up against him if possible." Ota's face was stern as he spoke.

"Planning to announce your candidacy for the party chair, then?"

"Think whatever you want."

Shimazaki's eyes glinted with cunning. "What do you think your chances would be?"

Currently within the Liberal Party, Ota was thought to be a strong candidate for party chair, but his faction held only a moderate amount of backing in the Lower House, his supporters there holding seats in the low 60s. In order for Ota to win the election, he'd need either another faction to support him or to crush one of his rivals entirely. Therefore it was only natural for him not to want to face off against Fujita.

"If only Hamano would support me in the election..." Ota stared at Shimazaki willfully, as if trying to communicate something implicit. And as if he understood entirely, Shimazaki nodded.

"I am sure things will turn out just as you would like. There's no need to worry."

"I never asked you to do anything! Still, since when have you been able to wield that much influence?" Ota asked the question in hushed tones.

"I am sure I will get the chance to tell you some day."

After all, you'll get to directly experience it for yourself eventually...

Shimazaki bared his yellow teeth in a grin.

Part 4: Chapter 4

It was 10PM in Miyamaedaira, a residential area in Mitaka near the Soga forest.

I wonder if Akinao is studying about now...

Tanouchi Midori's large eyes shone like the heroine of a girl's comic book, her slender face framed by short-cropped hair. Even though summer vacation was about to end, her skin was still white and smooth. It looked like vacation was going to come to a close without her getting a single chance to get into a bathing suit.

I doubt any other 17-year old out there has had a summer this boring.

Midori looked out the window with glazed eyes. She had been taking her college entrance exams lightly, thinking that even if she blew them off for a little bit, she could still get into a decent private liberal arts school. There should have been at least a little bit of time to go to the pool. The reason that she didn't end up doing so was out of duty to her boyfriend, who was studying to get into Tokyo University's engineering school.

"Maybe I should give him a call."

As she stood up, she thought she heard something.

"Eh?" Reflexively, Midori looked at her stereo. Often she would leave it on accidentally. But the power was off. As she tilted her head in confusion, she heard it again but much clearer--a voice echoing in her head.

Come, come to me...

"Who's there!?" Midori looked all around the room, a stern expression on her face. The voice sounded again in her head.

Come, Midori...

Midori's body naturally turned toward the direction of the voice. An inexplicable sensation of ecstasy, difficult to resist, urged her onward.

"OK." With a glassy-eyed expression on her face, Midori nodded. As she left her room, her family was waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. They all had an eerie, lifeless expression on their faces as if they were dreaming. However, this did not seem to trouble Midori in the least.

"Come on, Midori!" Midori's younger brother, who was in the third grade, had his hand on the door as if he couldn't wait any longer.

"Are you going to go in your sandals?" Midori's mother asked.

"Good point." Putting on her favorite heels, Midori left the foyer after her brother.

None of the family knew where they were going. But the voice in their heads told them there was no need for doubt.

At about the same time, a pair of sweat arms grabbed Yukiko's waist in an apartment in Miyamaedaira.

"Come on, not where it's bright!" Crying out in embarrassment, she pushed her boyfriend Tooru away. She had only met him two weeks ago on a trip to Okinawa. Even holding each other all day long, they never tired of it.

I get the sense I could love him forever... thought Yukiko.

She was a 20-year old college student. Tooru was still a high school student and a little irresponsible, but he had a very bright personality and always made her laugh with his jokes. But more than that, Yukiko liked his handsome looks.

"OK, I'll turn out the lights." Bowing to her wishes, Tooru flicked the light switch. Then he immediately grabbed her in a kiss.

As Yukiko murmured "I love you" in her mind, another voice echoed in her head.

Come...

"Did you say something, Tooru?"

"I was going to ask you the same thing!" As the two looked at each other perplexed, the voice sounded again.

Come....

There was something hard to resist in that voice. The two stood up simultaneously.

A huge line of people proceeded from Miyamaedaira toward the Soga Forest, seemingly going on forever. Those in it numbered at nearly two thousand.

At 10:15 PM, Officer Nimura, on dispatch in Miyamae, saw the first member of the group approaching.

What the hell is going on? Looking at the massive crowd approaching, Nimura scratched his head in confusion. Mothers leading their children. Couples walking hand-in-hand. There were even a few salarymen in the line, still in their suits and ties, looking as if they had stopped for a drink on the way home from work. Each one of them was just an ordinary citizen. But there was a strange air about the crowd that gave any onlooker the shivers.

"It doesn't look like they're here for some sort of event..."

Watching the procession, Nimura realized that not a single person in it was speaking. Feeling that there was just something not right about this, Nimura contacted the station and asked them what to do.

But the response he got was less than helpful.

"At this time of year they're probably going to a Bon dance or something. Don't bother the station with trifling matters like this!"

Irritated at the dispatcher, Nimura grabbed the arm of a salaryman at the end of the

procession and spoke to him.

"Excuse me! Where is everyone going at this time of night?"

But the man did not respond.

Nimura immediately realized that he was not being deliberately ignored. The man's glazed-over eyes looked forward without focus, and it was as if he did not even notice the police officer next to him.

Nimura spoke to the boy in front of the salaryman, who appeared to be a student. But there was no response from him either. The group simply proceeded to walk forward like a pack of lemmings. After a few moments of indecision, Nimura decided to join the end of the line.

He walked for maybe a little less than an hour. Residences became more and more sparse, and as the street lamps became further and further spaced apart, a deep fog enveloped the unusual procession. The fervor in the mob's eyes grew ever more insane.

"They're heading to the Soga Forest...?"

A bizarre stench assaulted Nimura's nostrils. It was like a musky, sort of rotten smell. Unconsciously Nimura gripped his police baton and stopped walking. Two meters ahead in a fog too thick to see through, the footsteps of the people became ever more distant.

Gradually, Nimura was overtaken by a creeping terror. When he finally started walking again, it might have been less because of his duty as a police officer and more that he did not want to be left all alone in the middle of the fog. Stumbling and tripping, Nimura ran ahead, several times nearly running into huge larch trees.

Soon the fog cleared ever so slightly. And in contrast, the strange smell became stronger. Right as he caught up to the end of the line, Nimura let out a sigh of relief and hid in the shadows of a large tree as he watched the people start to form a large circle. From somewhere in the middle of the circle, he heard the words of an incantation being chanted like a sutra. As the the voice became audibly louder, the crowd of people prostrated themselves on the ground.

When Nimura saw for the first time what was in the center of the ring of people, he had to use all his resolve to suppress a cry. A completely naked girl was tied up on a T-shaped Egyptian-style cross, which glowed with a dull silver light.

Is she a doll?

Her beauty seemed so perfect, that was the first thought that popped into Nimura's head. But her face, which every so often twisted in contortions of pain, gave lie to the fact that she was indeed a real human. The girl was encased in a veil of a clear, jelly-like substance. Nimura observed that the veil occasionally writhed like a living creature.

Is this for real? Are they shooting a movie here or something?

Nimura knew all too well that he was trying to make excuses to try and hold the terror at

bay. His entire body was rooted to the spot as if he was frozen. The sound of his breath assaulted his ears, almost sounding deafeningly loud.

What the heck is going on...?

How long had he been waiting there? An hour?

As it looked like the jelly veil rippled around the girl's head, two red lights started flickering in it, almost as if ornamenting her hair. Strapped to the cross, the girl writhed her head around. Nimura realized that she was stuck inside the body of some sort of mysterious creature that could only be described as a gigantic amoeba.

And that otherworldly creature was expanding rapidly. The two red points of light glowed brighter and brighter, before becoming two demonic eyes that darted over the area, glaring. The gelatinous substance had already engulfed the entire cross the girl was tied too, and was still getting bigger.

At that moment, Nimura noticed a man clad in a black robe standing behind the cross. Even from a distance, the lines on his face clearly delineated the features of a foreigner. The strange sutra-like incantation that he had been hearing was coming from this man.

All of a sudden, the incantation stopped. Silently, the man raised his right hand to the heavens. And as if on queue, the innermost ring of people in the circle stood up, tore off their clothes, threw them aside, and started advancing toward the cross in the middle. The amoeba pulsed, and engulfed their naked bodies. At that moment, their expressions were those of pure ecstasy.

The ring started to fall apart. Irritated that disrobing was taking so long, they all jockeyed to be first to be absorbed into this otherworldly creature's veil--young and old, man and woman. The girl tied to the cross had already become completely obscured by the mob. People climbed over one another, and Nimura thought he heard the dull sound of bones breaking. As all the people that had made up the ring appeared to transform into a massive mountain of bodies, lights ran through the membrane of the amoeba.

A low, rumbling roar that sounded as if it sprung from the very depths of the earth sounded, severing the last bare thread of Nimura's sanity. All the strength flowed out of his legs, and he fell to the ground on his backside; not being able to stand even if he tried, Nimura let out an incomprehensible wail as he started desperately crawling along ground, trying with all his might to get away as soon as possible.

Part 4: Chapter 5

Isma had realized that the bizarre life form that had torn itself out of Ohara's belly was a temporary body for Set, who had been planning to take form by possessing Loki's child.

According to his theory, summoning a demon via a computer would require creating a magnetic field with which to summon the demon and the processing of the demon's data to be materialized, both of which would have to be done at virtually the same time. If the magnetic field was weak, the point of connection between the demon's world and the Assiah world would narrow, constraining the amount of data that could be processed. On the other hand, no matter how powerful the magnetic field was, unless the digital data could be processed quickly and concisely, the demon would never be able to take form. It was quite possible that even a supercomputer would not be able to handle the massive amount of data that would be needed to materialize a high-ranking demon.

Despite that fact, the high-ranking demon Set was able to take form in the Assiah world, even if it was only in a makeshift body. Something must have added a great deal of power in setting up the necessary magnetic field for a summoning; this in turn would ease the restraints on the data processing.

Isma was convinced that something was Yumiko. Most likely, the high concentration of biological Magnetite within her body had been a major player in creating the magnetic field for the summoning. The divine constitution that she had inherited from Izanami was nothing but a giant retention of that highly concentrated Magnetite. While meager in comparison to that of Yumiko, ordinary humans also retained some biological Magnetite. If enough of it was collected, it might be able to create a permanent overlap of the Atziluth and Assiah worlds entirely.

Therefore, having already formed a contract with Set, Isma borrowed his power to summon many people and attempt to create a tower of human flesh. And everything was proceeding just according to plan. Even know the heavens split with a terrible thundering, and Set's most powerful servant, the great serpent Typhon, reared its head into the air as if slithering from behind a black curtain, knocking over the Soga Forest's trees as it went.

"Typhon, welcome. Breathe deeply and take in the air of the Assiah world."

Isma looked kindly at the enormous snake. "Take a look, your first victim awaits in the shadow of that tree."

As Isma pointed to the copse where Officer Nimura was, Typhon vanished beyond the trees. Meanwhile, Set had transformed into a gigantic, vile pillar of flesh, his sinister, red glowing eyes at its peak darting all around the area.

Typhon's presence is proof that the demon world Set rules is starting to meld with the

Assiah world. Now all that remains is to gather more biological Magnetite and solidify the connection...

Isma's eyes shimmered even brighter with madness.

Part 4: Chapter 6

As Officer Nimura tried to crawl away and escape, the foul air around him started whirling around in a circle.

What's that! What's going on...

Still crawling, Nimura put his hand on the pistol holstered on his waist. A strange gurgling sound was audible high above him in the air. Looking up, he was struck speechless and forgot to draw his gun. An enormous serpent, its black scales glittering in the moonlight, had its red maw wide open, the end of its long tongue at the tip of his nose.

Part 4: Chapter 7

The soft sound of the *geigi's* nails plucking the strings of a shamisen drifted from the Crane Room in the Takabayashi Pavillion located in Akasaka. Seated on the tatami floor, several men faced each other: Hamano, Minister of Foreign Affairs and aide to the Liberal Party Chairman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujita, and Chief Secretary Ota. The three men appeared to be smiling and chatting amicably, but the fact that their chopsticks had barely touched the food in front of them belied the tension that was heavy in the air.

With a whiff, the sound of the Shamisen stopped.

"Could you leave us alone?" Looking at Hamano straight on, Ota spoke to the *geigi*. The moment she left the room, he bowed down and spoke again in a dramatic voice.

"Mr. Hamano, I have a request of you from one man to another. In this autumn's Chair Election, please support my candidacy. Of course, after two years I will turn the reins over to you. I will never ask anything of you again so long as I live; please grant my request."

"Well, this is a shame. I had been informed that the party had been wanting me to be elected Prime Minister this autumn, but without your consent things could get messy." Hamano's reply was cold and hardly accommodating.

"So basically what you're saying is that we'll settle this in the election?" Ota's face clouded with anger.

"Come on, you two, let's not get carried away now..." Fujita interrupted the men.

"Mr. Hamano, Mr. Ota, either of you are perfectly qualified to take power. Well, of course, it is true that my faction would hold a lot of sway as to who gets the chairmanship this autumn..." Trailing off his attempt at appeasing the men, Fujita removed his glasses and slowly rubbed the bridge of his nose. Full of impatience, Ota and Hamano's sharp glares turned to the forehead of the composed Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Putting on his glasses, Fujita looked back and forth, comparing the two men.

"However...the Prime Minister has been thinking that he would feel better if Hamano won this autumn, and then Ota take over the post afterwards. I think it would be better for the party if Ota were to concede for the time being."

Ota's lips started trembling at Fujita's words. At this point, he had thought that Shimazaki had somehow managed to persuade these two heavy-hitter politicians.

"Mr. Ota, don't feel bad. I'm not trying to force you, but the Prime Minister has indicated who he'd like to be his successor directly." As Hamano's mouth continued to spout excuses, he started to get up. His blood boiling with humiliation, Ota stared down at the other man's feet.

Right at that moment, in his peripheral vision he saw a white shape dart across the room.

"Ooh!"

All of a sudden, Hamano cried out and bent over, his face turning purple.

"Mr. Hamano, are you all right!?"

As Fujita ran over to Hamano, Ota clearly saw a small white snake coil around the Chief Cabinet Secretary's leg. Taken aback, Ota turned around and saw that the sliding door to the room was open a crack; in its shadow he noticed Shimazaki's face grinning psychotically, and a chill ran down his spine.

Part 4: Chapter 8

The next day, the reporters in the Politics section of the Tokyo Daily were abuzz with the news that Hamano Masahiro, Minister of Foreign affairs, had pulled out of the upcoming elections.

"Now where the heck did I stick that file on Foreign Minister Hamano?" The young reporter Motoyama dug through a veritable mountain of manila folders piled up on his desk.

"Now Ota is a shoo-in for chairman," murmured the veteran reporter Watanabe while shaving. The phone in front of him had been ringing, ignored, nonstop.

From behind a desk, Imura chimed in. "That guy's just been on a roll since passing the National Secrets Protection Act."

"Don't you think this whole thing is Fujita basically giving his approval of Ota in light of his ability to get that thing passed?" responded Watanabe.

"So you think that Hamano abandoned his bid once Ota got Fujita's support?"

As the two grizzled veterans chatted amongst each other, Motoyama picked up the still-ringing phone next to them. With a skeptical look on his face, he listened to the voice on the other end of the line for a while before hanging up with a curt "You want the Society section for that."

"What's up?" Watanabe asked the question as if he wasn't too interested one way or the other.

"Oh, it's just more people talking about recent chains of mass unexplained disappearances in Musashino ward. It's probably just a load of crap, though."

"Come to think of it, I've heard that Tanouchi over in Econ hasn't shown up for work lately--doesn't he live in Mitaka city?"

Not thinking of the disappearances any further, the two reporters headed out to interview the politicians they were in charge of.

Part Five: Conflicts

Part 5: Chapter 1

The rays of the noontime sun scorched the interior of the Demon Banishment Project room. Narukawa, who had been away from the Project for several days after having been called back by Chief Secretary Fujita, looked positively haggard as he approached the table where Nakajima and Feed were arguing about something.

"Oh! You're finally back, Narukawa!" Feed stood up from his seat and arms apart, welcomed Narukawa almost as if to embrace him.

"While you've been away, we've nearly pinpointed where the demon has been summoned. If you had come any later, it would have been too late; Nakajima was about to rush headlong into the demon's lair by himself, and I wouldn't have been able to stop him...."

As Feed spoke, Narukawa looked at Nakajima with a complicated expression on his face.

"Could you tell me where that summoning point is?"

In response to Narukawa's question, Feed silently pointed to the monitor next to him. On it was displayed a map of Tokyo, the middle of which had a red light which was blinking profusely.

"It's an area about two kilometers in diameter that overlaps Mikata City and Musashino City. Right in the dead center of that area, there's a wooded area known as the Soga Forest."

"I see...By the way, Professor, Nakajima, I would like you to listen closely to what I have to report." Handing a file to the two, Narukawa's voice sounded unusually impatient as he began to speak.

"In the past week, nearly ten thousand people have vanished from Tokyo, and that's only the those we've received notice of. Most of them are residents of Mitaka City, Musashino City, and Nerima Ward, but since yesterday there have been noticeable disappearances in Koganei City and Suginami Ward as well. Nakajima, when you were exploring those areas, did you notice anything out of the ordinary?"

"I did notice that there weren't a lot of people out, but since I was going out with Kerberos I had to do so in the dead of night, and I always assumed that was the reason I wasn't seeing anyone..."

"Still, ten thousand people..." Struck by the sheer size of the number, Feed looked over and exchanged glances with Nakajima.

"There have even been areas where as many as 2000 people have completely vanished."

"I'm surprised it hasn't been all over the news," said Nakajima.

"We've been doing everything we possibly can to keep it that way." So saying, Narukawa

pulled a black-and-white photograph out of his pocket.

"Professor, you probably have heard about this. This is a photograph that was taken from America's Far East Spy Satellite."

In the center of the photo was an area that seemed to be wreathed in clouds. Feed groaned as he looked at it.

"This is almost the exact area that we've pinpointed..."

"This photograph kind of looks double-exposed." Just as Nakajima indicated, the center of the area in question looked indeed as if there were two different landscapes superimposed over one another.

"I can't explain why it came out like this, but this is indeed the point known as the Soga Forest. We've already sent out several operatives from the station to investigate the area..."

"This is way out of their league," spat Feed as he adjusted the photo in the light.

"Indeed, just as you say, not a single one of them has come back. It would seem that as soon as they get close to the Soga Forest their radios and sensors just cut out."

"How does the government intend to proceed?"

"Well..." Narukawa looked away.

"What's wrong?"

"Yesterday at the cabinet meeting they decided on a 'watch and wait' policy."

"What!?" Feed's white hair seemed to stand on end as he approached Narukawa.

"I'll go and persuade Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujita myself. No, strike that--I want to talk to the Prime Minister directly. I see that unless I explain in detail the danger of the demons, these stubborn politicians will never realize the gravity of the situation."

"Unfortunately that is impossible." Narukawa placed his hand gently on Feed's shoulder.

"That wasn't the only decision the cabinet made. They ordered the New AI Project--in other words, this Demon Banishment Project--to be dismantled as of today."

For several moments, Feed stood silently, his mouth agape. He couldn't understand just what it was that Narukawa was saying. Or perhaps it would be better to say that he didn't want to understand. Soon, in response to the cynical smile that had formed on Nakajima's face, he admitted to himself just how bad the situation had gotten and started speaking furiously in a mishmash of English and Japanese blended together.

"Why the hell did he break his promise!? Just why did those politicians think I came all the way to Japan in the first place!? As arrogant as it may sound for me to say it, I came to save this country from being overrun by demons! They don't give me the tools or manpower I need, and now they shut down the project at such a crucial juncture--what are they thinking!? Nakajima, come with me to America. I'm sure my country will let you use whatever tools we need."

Smiling slightly at the enraged Feed, Nakajima looked around the tense and chaotic room.

"Thank you, Professor. But I still have the responsibility to rescue Yumiko. I'm sure she was hurt far more than she should have been over what happened to my mother; at this point I'm the only one who can save her."

"Wonderful. Do you Japanese ever operate out of any other motive besides duty?"

"...Perhaps love is a type of duty." Perhaps even thinking his own comment to be a bit corny, Nakajima hid his face as he turned on his heels and put his hand on the doorknob.

"I'll come with you." Narukawa's voice echoed behind Nakajima.

"....?" For an instant, Nakajima looked back skeptically at Narukawa's determined face.

"I'm still a member of this project," responded bluntly, without adding the *And I still feel strangely connected to you somehow* that he was thinking.

"Geez, you two are so impatient." At some point, Feed had taken a handgun out of the drawer in his steel desk.

"A Smith & Wesson there, eh?...If anyone had known you had that, the Project would have been dismantled immediately," said Narukawa in surprise.

"Now that the Project is slated for termination anyway, there's no need to hold back. Besides, the ammunition in this gun is a little bit 'special.'" Sticking the magazine in his pocket, Feed smiled mischievously.

The elevator expelled the three men into the underground parking garage. Nakajima and Feed started to walk towards their car when Narukawa's arm shot out to stop them. As it did, Nakajima started looking around warily as if he had sensed something as well.

"What's the matter?" Midway through his sentence, Feed was suddenly shoved aside by Narukawa. That instant, a bullet whizzed over Feed's head and buried itself in the concrete wall behind him, leaving a hole.

"Looks like it's the Special Forces from the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, but I can't believe they'd actually shoot..." The second shot sped by Narukawa's face.

Narukawa dove behind the Crown parked next to him, pulling the other two men with him. His hand already gripped a Walther PP Super.

"I am Narukawa from the Second Unit of Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office. Did you know that when you shot at me?"

In response to his question a burst of bullets shattered the windshield of the Crown.

"I've got orders direct from the Chief. It's nothing personal."

"I know that voice--Saga, it's you, isn't it? Hear me out!" Narukawa started to stand, but Nakajima pulled him down. An instant later, dozens of bullets flew over their heads.

"We don't stand a chance against those full automatic Berettas. And there are at least five

of them." Still, Narukawa didn't loosen his grip on the Walther.

"We're just wasting time fighting here!"

"There's no other way out!" Before Narukawa had fully voiced his irritated reply, Nakajima had entered a command on his handheld computer.

"Kerberos, go get 'em. Try not to kill them though."

The demonic beast that leapt from the liquid crystal display gave a great roar and bounded over the ground in the direction of the gunshots. Moments later, the underground parking lot was filled with cries of pain and splashes of blood.

Part 5: Chapter 2

The sun had already halfway set. The white Corolla that Narukawa had procured was driving westward down Ouma Highway. Afraid that they might be trailed, he had picked this car because it stood out the least.

"It doesn't look like they've set up any checkpoints to look for us." Trying to cheer up the dejected Narukawa, Feed spoke with an optimistic tone in his voice.

"If they've sent the CISO special forces after us, it means they want to take us down in secret. However..."

With an expression as if it was all too much for him to handle, Narukawa passed the car in front of him.

"The man that was leading the group that attacked us was Saga, one of my subordinates. I can't believe that he would be lying. What could it have been that made the Chief Secretary give out such a drastic order..."

"A demon, most likely." It was Nakajima that spoke from the back seat.

"You're saying that demons have infiltrated the government?" Narukawa couldn't help but raise his voice.

"Look at how Nakajima's mother suddenly sided with Ohara. It all makes sense if a demon was using some sort of spell to control her. Ignoring the mass disappearances, the attempt to assassinate us, Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujita's sudden change of heart--it can't be a coincidence." Feed's voice betrayed clear signs of agitation.

"I just can't believe it." Narukawa sighed. For the first time since he met him, Nakajima sensed weakness in the man.

At about the intersection between Ouma Highway and Loop 8, the fog started to thicken. The number of cars on the road seemed to thin out significantly as well.

"I sense a demonic presence in this area as well," reported Nakajima anxiously, rolling down the window halfway. "There was nothing here when I scouted out the area two days ago though..."

As Narukawa's eyes darted to the rear-view mirror, his hands still gripping the steering wheel, Nakajima stuck his head out the window and stared at the empty sidewalk, letting the wind blow his hair back.

Shortly thereafter, the Corolla turned onto Inokashira Avenue. Devoid of light, the buildings in the area were like a ghost town.

"I don't believe this," Nakajima murmured to himself. "Day before yesterday, this place was perfectly normal..."

Soon, engulfed in fog, Narukawa had no choice but to slow the car.

"Don't you think it would be faster if we got out and walk?" Feed, impatient as ever, seemed as if he was about to jump out of the car at any time.

"Could be. Don't you think you should stay behind in the car though, Professor?"

"I'm sure what you mean to say is that I'd slow you down, but somehow I don't see the team of just a hero with a kidnapped girlfriend and a sidekick who knows nothing about demons producing any happy endings."

As Narukawa stopped the car, Feed took out his S&W magazine and showed it to them.

"This ammunition is full of mercuric sulfide. I'm sure it will work against demons a lot better than your handgun will..."

Narukawa bared his teeth in a grin and slapped Feed's shoulder.

"Mr. Narukawa, if *you* want to back out, now's the time." Nakajima was also grinning as he spoke.

"Right then. I'll run if the mood strikes me."

Now that I'm unofficially out of the CIRO, I really don't have any obligation to take on some unknown demon, but still...all I can say is that this seems like fate, or karma from a previous life. As if to keep his twisting anxiety in check, Narukawa considered his fate, which he decided to leave intertwined with that of Nakajima's.

The thick fog enveloped the three men, who had now left the car behind. It was heavy and slimy, and felt like the surface of plants in a swamp.

With Kerberos, who had been summoned from Nakajima's handheld computer, in the middle, the three proceeded toward the Soga Forest. Using only the light of the street lamps as a guide, they walked for maybe an hour. All of a sudden the fog thinned, and their surroundings clearly came into view.

But they were very strange surroundings. At the very least, they were nothing like any neighborhood in Tokyo they had known.

The lines of ginkgo trees along the roadside, which normally grew only slightly, receiving sustenance only from the carbon dioxide in the air, seemed far more robust than was to be expected; their branches were splayed out in every direction and their thick roots had shown themselves, having broken through the concrete of the sidewalk. The facades of the deserted buildings were covered in thick tropical vines, some of which were powerful enough to have shattered windows or even broken through the very roofs of houses.

"What is going on here..." Nakajima was the first to speak in surprise, having been here just a few days ago searching for Yumiko.

"It almost looks like the ancient Mayan ruins did when they were discovered...Eh? What's wrong?" Feed looked suspiciously over at Narukawa, who was pointing his Walther straight

in the air.

"Look!"

Nakajima's trembling finger pointed at a whitish bird circling around them over head.

"What? It's just a nocturnal bird."

"Look at its face, Professor." Speaking in a calm and composed voice, Nakajima backed up Narukawa.

The bird, which was looking down at them with sparkling azure eyes, clearly had the face of a human woman.

"It's a harpy. I've seen them several times in Siberia before; it's quite beautiful, isn't it?"

Letting his guard down at Feed's blasé reaction, Narukawa lowered his pistol.

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"Oh, it would definitely attack given the opportunity. But we're safe so long as Kerberos is with us."

As if it heard Feed's voice, the harpy shook its wings as if to fake out the demonic beast and dropped its altitude. Without any forewarning, a brown beast leapt out from amongst the treetops and smashed the monstrous bird's wing with its thick arm. Caught by surprise, the harpy plunged to the ground. As it did, the brown, monkey-like monster quickly leaped to the ground and with its sharp fangs bit into the neck of the harpy as it struggled to get up.

Kyaaaeeh!

Crying out in a shrill voice, the harpy desperately beat its wings. But its opponent had a leg up on it. Within moments, its thick arms had snapped the harpy's neck in a quick motion.

"Well, now we have proof that there's a food chain in the demon world," Feed rasped.

Dragging the harpy's corpse with it, the demon monkey climbed up a tree. Right before it entered a vine-covered house, it turned around in curiosity and looked at Nakajima's group. The single, foul eye in its heavily-wrinkled faced darted all around, sizing up the three. As it made eye contact with Kerberos, it made a simian screech and bounded out of sight.

"Oh, my. At this rate there's no telling what might attack us. Let's go into the forest now. We're sitting ducks out in the open right here," said Narukawa in a surprised voice as he returned to his senses.

"No, so long as we have Kerberos with us we've got the advantage on the ground. If we go into the forest and get attacked from above we're done for."

Nakajima had a point, so Narukawa decided to go along with him, and the three men once again proceeded slowly along the broken sidewalk, taking care not to trip over the stones and boulders strewn about.

We're surrounded.

With the Soga Forest in front of his eyes, Narukawa's sixth sense was buzzing. Kerberos lowered his head and crouched into a fighting pose. Nakajima also felt hundreds of eyes staring at them from amongst the trees. And those eyes were drawing ever closer.

Gluf, Gluf

Crying in a voice that sounded like it was coming from a strangled throat, a monster appeared from out of the darkness. It looked like a human, but its body was covered in shiny black scales. Its extruding, crimson eyes burned as it stared at them, and the red tear through its face that was its mouth was distorted and ghastly.

Another. And another. As if they were creatures born of the darkness itself, the monsters emerged from the cover of the trees. Gripped by primal fear, Narukawa fired his Walther over and over again. The nine-millimeter ammunition buried into the stomachs of the creatures with a splatting sound, and thick, milky white liquid oozed from the wounds. But they showed not even a hint of faltering and approached, their arms stuck out in front of them. Unable to suppress his hostility any longer, Kerberos attacked the mob without any command from Nakajima, and in moments had downed several dozen of them.

"Mr. Narukawa, get back!" Realizing that he had no choice but to fight, Nakajima pictured the two blue spheres in his mind. Just from his concentration, an eddy of flame formed in the air and a moment later the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi appeared in his right hand. Gripping its hilt, Nakajima slashed the sword with a tremendous battle cry.

The chests of the monsters were cleaved in two, and like a wave being drawn back into the sea, their scales vanished, leaving only white skin behind. Just like Ohara had, until recently these monsters had been living as ordinary people. Only Set could have transformed them into such demonic beings.

"Damned demons..." Nakajima gripped his sword and bit his lips, his eyes filled with indescribable desolation. Looking over at Feed, Nakajima saw that he was firing his Smith & Wesson over and over again while gripping his ornate cross. The mecuric sulfide bullets instantly killed the monsters that they struck, but far more of them were missing their targets than aiming true.

"Professor, the battle is just starting," called out Nakajima. "Please don't waste your ammunition!"

Indeed, it appeared that no matter how many of the monsters they defeated, their numbers seemed only to increase. There were probably almost a thousand of them. Nakajima called Kerberos and took a step back, glaring back at what appeared to be a writhing, infinitely thick wall of creatures.

I'm just going to have to force my way right through them... Right as Nakajima had set upon a plan, the hostility vanished from the eyes of the monsters. As their arms flopped to

their sides, every one of them turned around and shuffled back into the depths of the forest. Their empty stares were as if they were all in a trance.

Nakajima turned around, startled by a growl from Kerberos, and noticed that Feed and Narukawa also had a strange glimmer in their eyes.

"Professor! Mr. Narukawa!"

As if trying to cut through an invisible thread, Nakajima brought down the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi in front of their eyes. Suddenly returned to their senses, the two men looked at one another.

"That was close. We almost became enthralled by the demon as well." Shuddering, Feed flicked the safety of his pistol and put it in the pocket of his coat.

Following the creatures, the three continued into the Soga Forest, which was now an extension of the Atziluth World. Occasionally, a harpy flew overhead, beating its wings as if to mock them. Soon the fog cleared, and there waiting for them was a scene, bizarre far beyond any of their imaginations.

"That's.....!!" At the same time, the three cried out in surprise.

Next to the shimmering red-and-green striped surface of the swamp, an enormous fleshy tower jutted dozens of meters into the sky. One by one, the pack of creatures were climbing it. Those that ran out of energy on the way up were slurped into the protoplasm right there and absorbed into the tower of flesh. The surface of the tower was covered in the half-broken bodies of the creatures and countless writhing tentacles, the latter of which gave it the appearance of an enormous one-celled organism.

Feed and Narukawa forgot themselves and were entranced by the repulsive sight as if possessed. However, Nakajima quickly brought them back to their senses, and noticed a silver-haired man approaching, appearing from behind the shadow of the fleshy pillar. Nakajima got the sense that he recognized this man from somewhere, and soon Feed's cry made clear why this was.

"So, you really were behind all of this, Isma."

So this man is Isma...Professor Feed's brother.

"Nakajima, there's no need to hold back," cried Feed, "so long as he lives, the world will never be safe!"

Isma grinned coldly. The black robe that enveloped him whipped in the wind.

"Get him, Kerberos!"

At Nakajima's order, Kerberos charged Isma, but all of a sudden, bounced away as if he had hit an invisible wall in the air.

"Ha ha ha!"

Isma's body appeared to float in the air as he laughed, and two unusual lights appeared by his feet. Covered in jet-black scales, the great black serpent Typhon stared at Nakajima with its golden eyes as it slowly rose into the air with Isma riding on its back, as if the earth had suddenly given birth to an enormous tree. With its head nearly extended to the full height of the tower of flesh, the huge serpent shuddered and assaulted Nakajima. The lower half of Isma's body had been fused into Typhon's; perhaps it was another sort of fusion the demon could do in addition to its innate ability to absorb the earth and the air into its own body.

The sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi could do nothing against Typhon's rigid scales. Nakajima had no choice but to flee, pursued by Isma's loud laughter.

"You must have been quite lucky to have been able to defeat Loki like that! Stop struggling and become the next sacrifice!"

Meanwhile, Feed, realizing the gravity of the situation, whispered something to Narukawa as he handed over his pistol.

"Whatever you're planning, it won't work, Charles!" cried Isma from atop the serpent's head. "I'll eat you right after Nakajima!"

Kerberos jumped in attack from the side, but was knocked away like a rubber ball by Typhon's whip-like tail.

"Die, Nakajima!"

Holding the Smith & Wesson with both hands in a firing stance and aiming it at Typhon's gaping red maw as it attacked, Narukawa pulled the trigger.

For an instant, the great serpent stopped as if in discomfort. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Nakajima leapt up and plunged the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi into one of its golden eyes.

GYAAAH!

Crying out, Typhon whipped and spasmed. Sword and all, Nakajima was thrown aside, but Kerberos leaped into the air and caught him. Right at that moment, Nakajima got the sense that he heard Yumiko's voice from far away. Looking around in confusion, the image of Yumiko, bound to a cross and writhing in agony, appeared in his mind. Most likely, Set had sent him the picture of her current state as the core of his enormous protoplasmic temporary body. Nakajima noticed that one of the eyes in her lovely, terrified face was dripping blood.

"Hah, hah, hah! Brave young man, do not forget that Yumiko is Set's prisoner!"

Don't listen to him! The demons need my body! They would never kill me! Yumiko's voice cried out in Nakajima's mind, encouraging him.

Isma's laughing voice penetrated Nakajima's ears. "Indeed. The girl is needed to fuse this world and the demon world together. However, even if we cannot kill her, we can still torture her with unimaginable pain."

It was hard for Nakajima to withstand the awful sense of guilt and self-reproach he got when seeing Yumiko frantically trying to withstand the agony. Yumiko's remaining eye started to fill with tears of blood.

"Stop it!" Unable to withstand it any longer, Nakajima cast aside the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi and dropped to his knees.

"Nakajima, wake up! You can't listen to them! If you give in, what will happen to this country? What will happen to the world..."

Listening to Feed yelling his lungs out calling to Nakajima, Narukawa was overwhelmed, and was punching the ground with his fist.

This sort of thing has happened before!

Try as he might, Narukawa could not shake off an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

I must have some sort of power. Some sort of power to save that boy! Someone--god or buddha, I don't care--please awaken my power! That power will surely reveal my connection with the boy as well...

Part 5: Chapter 3

Right about that time in Yomotsuhirasaka, Izanami looked anxiously into the black skies. Her connection to the human world was largely dependent upon Yumiko's senses; so long as she was captured by demons, Izanami could not view it, nor could she possess Yumiko to save her.

The movement of the stars was the only connection between the human world and the netherworld remaining. And Nakajima's star was becoming visibly dimmer. Yumiko's star, right next to it, had dimmed so much it was not even visible without squinting. Meanwhile, the ominous red star around them was shining brighter and brighter.

"What happened!? I can't stand this. But I don't have the power to affect the human world..." Muttering with irritation, Izanami's eyes stopped at another star next to them, twinkling slightly.

"What's that...?"

Could it be another reincarnated god?

Kneeling, Izanami started praying frantically. "I don't know what god you are, but please awaken, for their sake."

As if in answer to the prayer, the star started glowing brighter and brighter. Momentarily, like a supernova, its light brilliantly lit up that area of sky.

Part 5: Chapter 4

All of a sudden, Narukawa extended his arms out wide toward the heavens and called out.

"Soul of the light of heaven and earth, light of the moon, come here to me, Tsukuyomi!"

Feed turned around in shock.

"So you've finally lost it." Isma also stopped the giant serpent, its mouth wide open and ready to swallow Nakajima, and turned to stare at Narukawa.

But the rumbling of the heavens and the earth that started the next instant wiped the sneering grin off his face.

The sky is falling, Nakajima thought as he looked up.

The stars in the sky, which were shining far more than usual, became a single band of light and shot down toward Narukawa, leaving a streaking tail behind it. Or at the very least, that was what it looked like to Nakajima.

"Mr. Narukawa..."

But it was no longer Narukawa that was standing up to fight the demon, but his identity in his former life, that of the moon god Tsukuyomi. Not waiting a moment, he threw the light

that was gathered around his right hand at the enormous snake.

GYAAAAAGH!

Like a laser scalpel, the arrow of light split Typhon's body in two down the middle. As Isma tumbled to the ground, Narukawa showed no mercy as he launched another attack on him. With no time to even cast a defensive spell, in an instant Isma was wreathed in flames, and screaming in anger and pain, attempted to grab Narukawa as he crumpled to the ground in a lifeless heap.

The sight reminding him of the death of his mother, Nakajima shrank back as a sudden shock ran down his spine. The air around him suddenly compressed, and a surge capable of freezing body and mind alike shot through the ground.

At last, Set had decided to fight directly.

The surface of his protoplasmic membrane rippled, and as the tower of flesh undulated, it came over Narukawa's head like a tsunami. Not retreating a step, Narukawa fired an arrow of light at the fleshy pillar, which stabbed deep into it with a slimy sound. But that appeared to have done no damage to Set whatsoever.

"Hurry! Hurry and escape with Nakajima! Hurry, while I hold him off! He is an important warrior!" Narukawa cried out to Feed.

"...OK. Good luck!" Nodding regretfully, Feed smacked Nakajima in the back of the head with his pistol as he tried to run and help Narukawa.

"Kerberos, run!" Putting Nakajima's unconscious body on Kerberos' back with surprising speed for a man of his age, Feed leapt up onto the beast after him.

"Forgive me, Narukawa." As if in response to the tear-choked cry, volleys of light beams fired into Set's body again and again. But they soon became less and less frequent, and the Soga Forest was again surrounded in an eerie silence. The fleshy pillar writhed into the sky triumphantly, and increased the speed at which it fused the demon and human worlds together. In the center of that protoplasmic mass, Yumiko, tied to the Egyptian cross, cried tears of blood.

Part Six: Demon City

Part 6: Chapter 1

"There was nothing we could have done. If he hadn't sacrificed himself so that we could get away, neither of us would be alive right now." Feed's voice sounded distant.

Sitting on the soft leather sofa, Nakajima finally opened his heavy eyelids and looked outside the window in a half-awake, half-asleep daze. At some point the wounds on his arms and legs had been bound in bandages, but he had no memory of who had treated them or when they did.

As if unaware that Musashino had turned into a demon city, the cars on the freeway sped past, their headlights forming a river of light. For a brief moment, Nakajima thought he saw the smiling face of Narukawa-turned-Tsukuyomi in those lights. More importantly, Nakajima could not understand why Narukawa had gone so far to protect him, even in defiance of his own organization. He could only think that there had been some sort of connection between them that defied logic, much like his own connection with Yumiko. All he wanted to do now is cling to the hope, however, small, that Narukawa had survived somehow.

"Hey, where are we?" Nakajima opened his mouth as if something had just come to him.

"We're in the American embassy. We're safe here." Almost right after Feed's reply came a knock on the door. A tall, elderly gentleman entered the room.

"How is our guest doing, Professor?"

The man's gentle, slender face turned toward Nakajima, and Nakajima realized that he had seen this person on television several times before. It was Blackwood, the American Ambassador to Japan.

"He looks a lot better. Thank you." Feed responded with a calm expression that Nakajima had never seen on the man before. Looking at Feed speak so casually with an important American government official and getting a glimpse of just how broad the professor's world was, Nakajima felt a twinge of loneliness. He knew better than anyone else that he had no place that he belonged at the moment. As he hung his head in shame, the Ambassador appeared to have mistaken it for anxiety and came over to shake his hand.

"Everything's all right. Professor Feed has told me everything. We will never hand you over to the Japanese government, even if they demand it." Blackwood's Japanese was flawless.

Nakajima said nothing and took the man's warm hand to shake it.

"By the way, Ambassador, have you arranged for a jet?"

"We've got an F14 waiting. It'll depart for the US at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Ambassador."

"No need to thank me. Say hi to the President for me."

As if waiting for the ambassador to disappear behind the door, Nakajima spoke to Feed.

"Are you going back to America, Professor?"

"Yes. About that..."

Feed sat down on the sofa across from Nakajima and leaned forward. His eyes were glittering like those of a mischievous child.

"I've finally discovered a fool-proof way to banish the demon."

"What!?"

"I know it's difficult to believe, but this is a sure thing. Remember what I said a while back? If there are two magnetic fields that simultaneously attempted to summon a demon, if the difference in their strengths was large enough, the demon would automatically be pulled to the field that was stronger. What is it that determines how strong the magnetic field would be?"

"The makeup of the atmosphere, gravity, the geomagnetic polarity...and the state of mind of the people would probably also have a large effect as well."

"You've got it. I'd have expected nothing less from my best pupil." At some point, Feed had decided that Nakajima was his student. Confused, Nakajima shook his head at Feed's words.

"Don't you understand what I'm getting at? Here, take a hypothetical example. What do you think would happen if you could create a magnetic field that had no interference from the atmosphere, gravity, and geomagnetism?"

"Well, of course, in theory it would be immensely powerful. But trying to artificially create such an environment would take enormous amounts of time and money, and..."

As if he had thought of something, Nakajima stopped in the middle of his sentence.

"I get it! In outer space! You're going to use a satellite!"

Feed nodded in satisfaction.

"There's no way to predict what a demon banished into outer space would do. But if we were able to pull Set onto a satellite raised into dead orbit, he would never be able to meddle on Earth again so long as the computer kept running. There would be plenty of time to develop a weapon capable of taking him out in the meantime. I have to return to the US to get the government's approval to use a satellite in dead orbit."

"Is there a satellite with a computer powerful enough to summon a demon?"

"Of course. My country has launched a satellite in geosynchronous dead orbit at 135 degrees East as a base to control the future SDI satellites. Currently it's only operating at 30% capacity. It'd be perfect for summoning Set." Feed's voice was full of confidence.

"What will you do? Trying to take on Set all by yourself at this point would be nothing but

foolishness. I would think it be best for you to stay here until everything is resolved..."

As if chasing an illusion, Nakajima's eyes drifted to the window.

"I think your plan has a very high chance of succeeding. But there's something you forgot, Professor."

"What?"

"If you pull off your plan, Set's temporary body, which is currently fusing the human world with the demon world, will experience a tremendous shock as its environment suddenly changes. I think it would be safe to say there would be no chance of saving Yumiko, who is currently inside him."

Feed was silent.

"I'm going to fight Set again. But before that, I want to find the goddess Izanami. Izanami may have some wisdom as to what to do..."

"So I fight for humanity, and you fight for your girlfriend. Well, that's fine, then."

Feed stood up and offered Nakajima his hand.

Part 6: Chapter 2

Early the next morning, two Cadillacs under heavy guard drove away from the mist-enshrouded American Embassy toward the west. One headed to the Yokosuka Military Base, and the other headed west down the Tomei Expressway. A black sedan tried to follow them, but perhaps was afraid of the guard, as it quietly made a U-turn as soon as the two cars split up to head to their respective destinations.

Part 6: Chapter 3

Later that afternoon, Shimazaki visited Ota's office in Nagatacho. Not yet aware that Isma had died, he drew closer to Ota with an air of confidence.

"Now you've done it, Chief Secretary. Professor Feed has left the country!"

"You said that all you wanted is for his project to be dissolved, so what's the problem? I'd have thought you'd be pleased that he decided to leave the country of his own accord."

"That's true, but that high school student Nakajima has apparently disappeared..."

"Oh, come off it! Do you really think someone of my stature can be bothered with some high school student?" Ota's voice was laden with irritation.

"He might become a great interference in our plan."

"*Our* plan?" Ota looked at Shimazaki haughtily.

"I don't ever remember asking you for anything. Events just happened to turn in my favor, that's all. Rather than dealing with that sort of nonsense, rumors of the bizarre occurrences in Musashino Ward has become a real problem for the cabinet. Using Fujita and Hamano I've managed to keep things from getting out, but if things start spreading to the 23 wards, we can't just sit by and do nothing. You better ask your precious Saint to stop playing demon."

"I'll do what I can..." Shimazaki responded with a long face.

Without Isma, he had no teeth; Shimazaki could not approach the opening to the demon world. Furthermore, since he didn't know just how much power the demons had, if Ota put on a bold front, there was nothing he could do to counteract him.

"At this rate, we may just have to use the SDF." Watching Shimazaki's expression, Ota spoke as if trying to gauge his reaction.

"After all this, you want to oppose the demons!?"

"Too much of even the best medicine will make you overdose. It wouldn't bother me in the least of the demons just up and vanished."

"If the demons heard you saying something like that..." Shimazaki was clearly losing his composure.

"Oh, don't worry. What I say now will never leave this room. At all..."

Baring his teeth in a grin, Ota snapped his fingers. A tall man who was waiting in the adjacent room approached casually. Ota pointing with a jerk of his head, the man slipped around behind Shimazaki. Shimazaki stiffened reflexively and a slight stabbing pain shot into his thick neck.

"What are you doing!?" Shimazaki leaped up from the sofa.

"I won't let anyone try to pull anything funny on me--even you, Mr. Ota!"

However, greasy blobs of sweat were already appearing on his red face, and his legs started wobbling.

"You'll die painlessly. That was an anesthetic they use to execute prisoners in Texas. Go ahead, take a nap...though you'll never wake up."

"Wha...t?" Shimazaki's body tumbled forward as he bit hard down on his lip.

"OK, Kuroda. I leave the rest to you. The Cabinet is waiting for me."

Acting as if nothing had happened, Ota strolled out of the room, not once looking at Shimazaki's corpse sprawled on the floor.

Part 6: Chapter 4

In his manor, about a dozen reporters were crowded around Prime Minister Nakasone, who remained impeccably dressed in a business suit despite the heat of the summer.

"Prime Minister, what is this emergency cabinet meeting about?"

"Is there any progress regarding this autumn's election?"

There was no end to the reporters' questions. But there was a look of irritation on every one of their faces. The mass disappearances centered around Musashino Ward were now an open secret. But under strict orders of silence, none of them could ask nothing about it.

While Set had craftily been gathering only the residents of an individual ward, after losing Isma, his Assiah-word co-conspirator, he had started indiscriminately absorbing humans from all over. The situation had gone far beyond the point where it could be concealed.

"I only wish I had the answers you are looking for." Leaving this one comment, the Prime Minister disappeared into the cabinet room with a pained expression on his face.

"I have been waiting for you, Prime Minister." Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujita's cracking voice called to Nakasone as he entered the cabinet chamber.

The prime minister looked painfully at the tired face of the loyal retainer who had been the motivator of his rise to power.

He's been the one who has been fiercely insisting on keeping the disappearances quiet. Now that things have gotten as bad as they are now, I have no choice but to make him take responsibility.

Having to do so was one of the weights on the Prime Minister's mind. He had no way of knowing that the Chief Cabinet Secretary was possessed by an Apep.

"Minister of Home Affairs, report on the situation."

"As of 10:00 Am this morning, the number of those missing ranks at 42,500. The areas hit have spread to Nerima Ward and Sugunami Ward in the east, and Koganei City in the west. Immediate measures must be taken." Minister of Home Affairs Hanashi, who had been forbidden to send out any search teams, replied with an irritated voice.

"Have a look at the area right now." Defense Minister Kurihara stood and pressed a button on the table.

The image of the streets of Musashino City flickered on a screen in front of them.

"This is footage taken from one of our RPVs. (Remotely Piloted Vehicles)"

Since Set had started indiscriminately hunting people, the veil of fog that had blanketed the area had started to clear more and more, and the RPV sent a clear picture of the surroundings for two meters all around to the liquid crystal display. The business district in by Kichijoji station, the great green scenery of Inogashira Park, and quiet residential districts sped by onscreen. The image looked eerily peaceful as hardly anything onscreen was

moving at all. Spinning the dial by his hand, Kurihara zoomed in on the screen. The rays of the sun reflected off the hoods of abandoned cars strewn about Inogashira Avenue. Cats wandered the human-free town as if they owned it.

"What on earth is going on?" Murmurs broke out in the room.

Shortly the RPV started moving toward the west. All of a sudden, it appeared as if the scenery onscreen had changed to that of a tropical jungle.

"What the hell is that?" There was a stir amongst the entire cabinet.

Manipulating the dial, Kurihara zoomed the camera in even further, and its bizarre form filled the screen.

The wet, slimy, gelatinous thing appeared to be an immensely enormous one-celled organism. It was clearly alive, as the membrane enveloping its central core throbbed gently. Silently, Kurihara moved the RPV, rotating it around the otherworldly creature, which appeared to be like a skyscraper of flesh jutting into the sky.

"Hey, isn't that a human?"

Nobody responded to Nakasone's exclamation. The ghastliness of the scenery had stunned everyone. A line of people, hundreds of them, led out of the forest, advancing toward the tower. As they approached it, they tore off their clothes and naked, extended their arms in front of them like sleepwalkers before being absorbed into the protoplasm. The transparent jelly dissolved their bodies almost instantaneously, fusing them with the lump of meat that was its nucleus.

"Chief Cabinet Secretary, Foreign Minister Hamano, it was you two who so forcefully suggested we cover this up, no...?" The speaker was Minister of Education Shiokawa. But even the Minister of Education's voice, known wide for its forceful complaints, sounded dry and scratchy.

"This was an unexpected development. There's nothing we could have done!" The words sounded nothing like those of the Prime Minister's right-hand-man, the man so well-known by everyone for being forthright and honest.

Has he gone mad?

The thought was in everyone's heads as the sound of a telephone broke the silence.

"I told you to shut out all calls during the cabinet meeting, no matter what they were!" The officer that picked up the phone spoke into it in a hushed voice, but as soon as he heard the speaker on the other end, his face drained of color.

"Prime Minister, we have an emergency phone call from President Reagan of the US."

"What is it!?" Suspiciously, Nakasone took the receiver. Nakasone was famous for being the most fluent speaker of English amongst Japanese politicians. Still, he couldn't help but cry out "I don't believe it!" in Japanese during his conversation with Reagan.

Right at that moment, there was a scream from behind him. As Nakasone turned around, he nearly dropped the receiver, forgetting for a moment that he was speaking to the

President.

Fujita and Hamano were screaming in laughter, yet without making a sound. Their faces became more and more purple by the moment. Fresh blood spewed from their lips, their ears burst, and their eyeballs, staring emptily into nothingness, were expanding as if they were about to pop out of their sockets. A horrible rotting smell permeated the meeting room.

"Let the SP and the paramedics in! Don't let any of this leak to the media!" Ota, who had come to his senses earliest, ordered the officer who had picked up the phone, who was standing still, his mouth agape.

Well, I suppose it can't be helped. If these two die here, nobody else will know my secret. Ota's greatest wish had come true.

The heads of the two men, whose features were now distorted far beyond anything normal, limped loosely, and their bodies dissolved into puddles of slime like rotten fruit on the ground.

In the chaos of people running about in the room, not a single person noticed the two small white snakes slip out of the now two formless bodies lying in a pile on the ground.

Meanwhile, Ota was laughing inside as everything had seemed to proceed as he had planned, but the next instant, his face twisted in an expression of terror.

The red eyes of the snakes were watching him closely.

"Aagh!"

As Ota reflexively took a few steps backwards, his feet slipped on the blood-drenched carpet. He tumbled to the ground, and the two serpents quickly slithered toward his head.

Meanwhile, the enormous pillar of flesh continued to display onscreen, though nobody was watching it any longer. All of a sudden the camera angle changed sharply. It appeared as if the entire screen shook for a moment before it was filled completely with green as the flow of data from the RPV stopped.

Part 6: Chapter 5

It was 3:00 PM the same day, in Asukamura, located in Nara prefecture. Bathed in the burning rays of the sun, the green of the trees was bright enough to pain the eyes. Blisfully unaware of what was going on in the capital, the faces of the hikers treading the gravel road were drenched in sweat.

"Hey, want to head to Okadera next?" The college-age girl with the bob-haircut spoke coaxingly to the man with her.

"We're still a far clip from Tonomine Hotel. If we make too many detours the sun will go down while we're still on the mountains." Taking off his sunglasses, the man pointed toward the mountains nearby.

"We'll be fine, the sun is still high in the sky. Ah, a car."

At the woman's voice, the man sluggishly moved to get out of the way.

"Hmph, a Cadillac out in the sticks like this? Wish they'd give us a ride." Watching the car kick gravel aside as it drove out of site, the man turned and followed the woman.

"Can you let me out here?" Nakajima spoke to the black man driving the car as soon as he saw the stone tumulus. Opening the rear door of the car as it slowed to a stop, he jumped out onto the ground of Asuka.

"Good luck!" The driver showed his white teeth in a smile, than turned around, waving his hand.

Narrowing his eyes and looking at the far-off scenery with deep emotion, Nakajima sighed deeply and started walking to Shirasagi Mound. The rays of the sun pulled Nakajima into a sense of surrealness, as if his feet were not touching the ground. With effort, by imagining Yumiko trapped inside the fleshy pillar of Set's body, he was able to pull himself from the strange sensation back to the world.

Will I really be able to find Izanami again? The road between here and Yomi should have been sealed ages ago!

Nakajima pictured himself standing dumbfounded in the stone room, unable to find the pathway into Izanami's burial chamber. Even the instant he stepped onto Shirasagi mound, he could not seem to be able to convince himself totally that his memory from the month before was not just one big illusion. The traces of Kerberos' passing before had been completely concealed by the overgrowth. Nakajima stepped into the cool air blowing out from the Kumazasa-covered entrance to the tomb. As he saw the small hole from within the stone burial chamber that the cold was flowing out of, Nakajima's eyes finally lit up with a purpose.

For several hours, he gradually climbed down the long sloping passage. At the end of the

long burial pathway, the silver relief marking Izanami's burial chamber was glowing. But the walls bore clear marks telling the tale of just how ferocious the battle with Loki there had been. The shattered fragments of the pots in the room lay there as before.

Nakajima stepped up to the side of the white granite dais. Taking some of the pomade from one of the few unbroken pots, he sprinkled it over the human-shaped ash on its surface.

With a feeling of awe, Nakajima put his palms together and closed his eyes. Shortly, as he sensed the scent of the pomade being blown by a fresh breeze, there stood the unmistakable form of the goddess Izanami before him.

"I've been waiting for you." Though her voice was laden with the kindness of a mother greeting her child, Nakajima could clearly hear the anxiety in it.

So Izanami doesn't know exactly what is going on in the human world them...

Nakajima briefly explained to the goddess about his brief reunion with Yumiko, the battle with Set, and the banishment project that Feed had been secretly working on.

"I feel sorry for what happened to Tsukuyomi," said Izanami as Nakajima finished his tale.

"Tsukuyomi...you mean Narukawa? Was there some sort of deep connection between me and him?"

"Tsukuyomi is the god of the evening light. In an earlier life, he was one of your most powerful children."

For a moment, the two were silent. Nakajima felt a sense of deep guilt for Tsukuyomi, who had been killed by demons without any chance to be glorified in his reincarnation. But there was no time to be held back by sorrow.

"Izanami, if Professor Feed's test succeeds, what will happen to Yumiko?" That more than anything is what Nakajima wanted to know.

"Nothing like that has ever been tried before. Unfortunately that lies beyond the bounds of my knowledge." Izanami sighed softly.

Without any other sort of plan of action, if Feed managed to convince the American government, the demon summoning program would be activated on the satellite in dead orbit within a day or two. Somehow, Nakajima had to rescue Yumiko before that happened.

"Please, I beg you, give me the power to defeat Set. Even if it costs me my life, I have no regrets."

"I have no other power to give you. However...." Izanami, who had hesitated for a moment, was taken aback by Nakajima's concern for Yumiko, and quietly removed her robe, handing it over to him.

"Wear this robe. With it you will gain the ability to race through the heavens."

Averting his eyes from Izanami's pure, shining white naked body, Nakajima gently took the robe. It was as light as feathers and had the warmth of human skin.

"That robe was given to me by my husband Izanagi. It is also my connection to the human world. If you take that robe, then I may never be able to appear in the human world again. Nor even be able to possess Yumiko..."

Nakajima stiffened at Izanami's unexpected words.

"But that is also the soul of Izanagi. Truthfully, it would be most fitting if you wore it."

Izanami's voice became fainter and fainter. Looking up timidly, Nakajima saw her white skin lose its form, as if melting away into the darkness.

"Now go. Please take care of Yumiko..."

"Lady Izanami!"

As Nakajima instinctively extended his hand, it passed through Izanami's holograph-like transparent body and clutched the air. Only a small amount of ash remained in his grasp.

Part 6: Chapter 6

It was evening, and the streets of Kabukicho in Shinjuku were full of people. The alleyways leading to Shinjuku Station's eastern entrance were noisy with the sound of various music coming out of bars mixed with that of charming feminine voices. Along the roadside, a young salaryman was patting the back of a drunken woman, stooped over and vomiting. He looked slightly fed up, but seemed slightly reluctant to leave her.

It was not as if nobody was watching; a taxicab driver was looking at the two with an expression as if he was tired of seeing the same sight for the hundredth time.

A middle-aged woman with hair dyed red bent over next to the man.

"Hey mister, you got a light?"

"Eh? Sure." Not caring who it was, just happy that someone interrupted him, the man looked somewhat relieved as he held out his lighter.

"Light it for me, will you," said the woman.

The kindly man showed no sound of anger at the obnoxious request, flipped open the 100-yen lighter and lit the woman's cigarette. Blowing out a puff of smoke, she looked into his face.

"You're a pretty nice guy. Why not ditch this girl and come with me?" The redhead threw a hostile glance at the woman next to him, who had not finished throwing up. Tobacco fell from her fingers.

"I can hear the call!" She stood up, her eyes glittering with ecstasy. As if following her lead, the young man did as well.

"Tatsuya, where are you going?" Wiping the vomit off of her lips, the young woman, still crouched over, looked up at the man.

But as if her boyfriend had completely forgotten about her, he started walking away alongside the red-haired prostitute.

"What's wrong with you, you jerk!? I'm never going out with you again!" Her blouse still open and her chest exposed, the woman staggered to her feet.

Soon her eyes too stared into emptiness.

To the west.

The people just silently started walking.

Part 6: Chapter 7

Inside the makeshift Capital Defense Base set up underground beneath the Ministry of Defense, a line of people over 10 kilometers long displayed on the video screen. The RPV was relaying the situation on the ground near the heart of the city.

"They've finally made it all the way to Shinjuku!" The voices of the cabinet ministers were full of deep dread.

"I'll leave how to proceed up to you, Mr. President. Please let me know the results." Ending the latest of his several conversations with President Reagan, Prime Minister Nakasone hung up the receiver, his face pale.

"The Americans have already entered into final deliberations about the Demon Banishment Project. In case of emergency, they're sending the bulk of the 7th Fleet to Japan, which is already on its way. I've just put the capital under martial law. Both Narita and Haneda airports will be closed off, and I would like to begin directions for evacuating the populace to Tohoku or Kansai as soon as possible. Kurihara, how is the SDF doing?"

"70,000 ground-based SDF soldiers, including the Ranger units, have already been deployed. They're working with teams of riot police to attempt to split up that strange line of people. Since there's a high chance of catching civilians in the crossfire at the moments, we're having trouble using any heavy weaponry, but we are looking for a chance to come up so that we can attack." Defense Minister Kurihara's description of the situation was calm and composed.

"The only real problem is that mobilizing the SDF any more rapidly could antagonize the Russians. Sightings of scouts from eastern Russia have notably increased."

"I've already sent word through diplomatic channels to let them know that neither our actions nor those of the Americans have any hostility, but..." Foreign Minister Hamano's acting substitute interrupted in a weak voice.

The writhing mass of the tower of flesh, now even larger, was now displayed onscreen. Only Ota was looking at that otherworldly life form, his eyes full of adoration.

Part 6: Chapter 8

The data from the RPV was being fed in real-time from the Ministry of Defense via American military satellite to the Space Command Center in Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado.

"The President has decided on a basic level to support Professor Feed's plan." Aide to the President Richard spoke while staring at the bizarre phenomenon attacking Tokyo onscreen. Opposite the screen, a monitor was set up on the far end of the long rectangular meeting table. Sitting at the table were Aide Richard and Professor Feed, along with General Louis of the Space and Missile Defense Command and Baker, the engineer who in essence was in control of the SDI.

President Reagan's concerned face displayed on the monitor. The teleconferencing system in Peterson Air Force Base was connected directly to the White House.

"So, essentially we are faced with the choice of using a satellite in low orbit, one in dead orbit, or whether we should try to fire a satellite out of Earth's gravitational pull entirely when summoning the demon." Baker pushed his thick glasses up his nose with his finger.

"We only have two satellites currently capable of summoning a demon. The Satellite Early Warning System Satellite Hummingbird at a height of 8,000 kilometers, or the satellite Star Scorpion, which is in dead orbit at a height of 35,000 kilometers. However, both satellites are important for our country's defense, and if anything happened to either of them it could cause great problems in case of nuclear warfare." General Louis spoke disinterestedly. "Of course, this would all be moot if the Japanese Self-Defense-Force were able to solve the problem on their own..."

Aide Richard pressed a switch by his hand and a map of Tokyo appeared on the screen. Many green dotted lines on it pointed toward a large red cross that was situated a little left of center on the map, an indication of Set's location and the people moving toward him. On the monitor, President Reagan turned to the side, apparently looking at the same diagram being sent to a screen in the White House.

"In order for the SDF to attack Set directly, they will have to keep the civilians from getting near him. However, according to the CIA's simulations, they will need at least 300,000 soldiers to be able to pull this off. The Japanese government can barely pull together 100,000 soldiers around the capital. They would have to get outside help first." Aide Richard was clearly hinting that the American armed forces would have to get involved.

"So, gentlemen, which satellite would be most appropriate to use?" The president spoke from the monitor. Realizing that one way or another he would be forced to lose one of his military satellites, General Louis looked up toward the ceiling and sighed.

Feed leaned toward the President on the display and spoke. "There is only one option. We must use the satellite in dead orbit."

"Why is that?"

"A low-flying satellite will pass over other countries' airspace, including those of potential enemies, and the potential for an international incident is too great should any unforeseen consequences come of summoning the demon to the satellite. Furthermore, all satellites in low orbit are fated to eventually fall to earth, and should we not come up with a method to destroy the demon permanently, that would mean summoning it to the surface once more. Launching a satellite out of Earth's orbit would of course be ideal, but it would take too long to prepare. Every minute we sit here, roughly 50 more citizens of an allied country are falling prey to Set's efforts to gather human Magnetite."

"Very well. I shall communicate to Prime Minister Nakasone our plan to use the satellite in dead orbit then. General Louis, you shall head up the operation."

"Yes, sir!"

First a military man, Louis stood to salute.

Part 6: Chapter 9

As if to split Tokyo on a north-south line, the riot police, stationed along Loop 7, set up a thick barricade to try and push back the line of people toward Shinjuku. Here and there, young soliders could be seen cowering at the sight of the massive line of over 100,000 people and being screamed at by their superiors as a result.

"You can use tear gas if you need to. Do whatever you can to push back the flow of people!"

The duralumin shields futilely attempted to push back the people. Those that fell over after being knocked over by the shields were trampled underfoot casually by the next group behind them. In the face of the meaningless bloodbath, the younger soldiers trembled in fear.

Furthermore, in the midst of the chaos, some of the army men themselves abandoned their posts and joined the line, enthralled by Set's call. At the same time, the missile launcher teams that had been waiting for the order to open fire left their vehicles and mixed in with the throngs of civilians. Their owners gone, abandoned flamethrowers and portable surface-to-air missiles littered the sidewalk.

While being enthralled by the visage of the enormous demon tower in their heads-up displays, the Airborne SDF also appeared to have been ensnared by Set's call; unable to attack, they dived the noses of their aircraft without hesitation and crashed amongst the trees of the Soga forest.

Before even getting the chance to find out whether or not modern weaponry would work against Set, the officers in the Capital Defense Base had no choice but to recognize that there was nobody left to operate it.

Part Seven: To Space

Part 7: Chapter 1

The Kumazasa was wet with morning dew. As Nakajima left Shirasagi Mound behind him, the calm expression on his face showed not a trace of the worry that had lined it when he came here to ask Izanami's help. Turning around one last time, he sucked in a deep breath and kicked off the ground as hard as he could.

His body seemed as light as a feather. As if coming to the surface from deep within the ocean, Nakajima floated through the air, his arms pushing in a swimming motion. The wind whipped at his ears. But it was not that of a great howl, but a comfortable sound like that of cloth fluttering in the breeze.

Using one arm to push the air aside and twist his body, Nakajima started flying parallel to the ground. Below him, the Ishibutai tombs and roofs of ancient temples looked scattered amongst a pale green panorama. Leaving Asuka, Nakajima went in a straight line to the east. Soon, the blinding blue-black shimmer of Ise Bay spread out below him. Further ahead, the Nobi plains and the peaks of the Japan Alps appeared to be looking up at Nakajima gently flying across the sky.

Nature gave birth to and killed millions of lives here...

Ages ago, the gods Izanami and Izanagi had a great fight. That day, Izanami vowed to take the lives of one hundred people per day, and in response Izanagi vowed to give life to two hundred people per day. Whether or not the gods actually had any interest in the lives or deaths of the race of humans, surely there was no conflict over whether any individual life survived or died.

In ages past, this Toyoashihara might have been the country of the gods. But present-day Japan was created by the efforts of people, and ruled by people. It would be difficult to see any opportunity for the gods to interfere.

And am I really Izanagi's reincarnation? At the very least, that's what Izanami told me. But I do not want to be a god. I want to live and die as a person...

If Nakajima could really compare himself with a god, things would have been so much easier for him. Then he would have been able explain away the fact that because the single program he created caused his mother, Yumiko's family, and thousands--tens of thousands--of people to die as a destiny given to the race of humans by the gods. The gods simply would have given a cruel trial to humans who put too much faith in their own power by making them face off against technology-produced demons. It would seem natural for the demons would destroy the human world, and after the people had seen just how powerless

they were, then the ever-capricious gods would step in and save them by driving off the demons.

Even if I really am Izanagi's reincarnation, I could not become a god. I only created that program to get revenge on those who hurt me for no reason. And now I am using all of the power Izanami gave me to save Yumiko, just one person that I love...

Gaining altitude, Nakajima plunged into the clouds. Crisp, cold air caressed his cheek.

More than accepting the fact that his attacking the demons was out of stubborn insistence on rescuing Yumiko, Nakajima was trying to hold onto his identity as a person. But ironically, Nakajima had not yet realized that destroying the many in favor of an individual was also a common act of those very same ever-capricious gods. Furthermore, from the moment he had donned Izanami's robe, his body had subtly started transforming from the inside out.

Part 7: Chapter 2

A deafening explosion broke Nakajima's concentration.

A star-mark-adorned F-14 jet divebombed, slicing through the clouds. Nakajima all of a sudden found himself hovering over a battlefield. Below him was a hair-raising sight.

An unbelievably large lump of flesh, a hideous tower of raw meat, was slowly writhing. Its pale green, transparent gelatinous membrane was greedily expanding at its base. Several long black rivers flowed into it. No, what looked like black rivers were actually the hair of the people heading toward the tower. Tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people tore off their clothes and proceeded forward completely naked.

Rapid explosions echoed through the air. The SDF's F14 jets scrambled from the 7th fleet were attacking, targeting the top of the tower so as to minimize injury to the humans below. A rain of bullets from an attack helicopter's machine guns sprayed through the air. Though that ammunition was capable of penetrating tank armor, it was absorbed without any resistance into the body of the ever-expanding otherworldly creature, as if it was laughing at the pathetic attack. It was almost as if it was trying to prove that any attacks against it would be futile.

Nakajima pictured the blue spheres within his mind. His body was wreathed in a scorching wind, and then in his right hand he gripped the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi. Gripping the hilt with both hands and holding it forward, Nakajima cut through the air, charging toward the summit of the tower.

GRAAAAGH!

Nakajima's attack appeared to have given his target a shock it could not ignore; the demon Set, formerly engrossed in absorbing humans into his own body, turned his attention toward Nakajima and interrupted his mind control of the people he had been manipulating. As a result, the people advancing toward the tower were suddenly freed from their trances. Around the tower, an ocean of ghastly protoplasm spread out, its gelatinous walls crashing down like a tsunami. Far above, the fighters darted amongst themselves and an attack helicopter plummeted to the ground in a ball of fire, having being hit by an attack from Set.

The hellish sight now standing before the people suddenly brought back to their senses was far too much for them to handle. Instinct overpowered them, and a cruelty far greater than when they had been controlled by the demon possessed them as in their efforts to save themselves they blindly knocked over others, trampling their naked backs and stomachs underfoot. Seeking new victims, an ocean of blood and bile let off a great stench.

So, you really did come after all.

Already inside the tower of flesh, a powerful psychic wave assaulted Nakajima's mind. As

if trying to shake off the headsplitting pain, Nakajima slashed his sword around. The inside of Set's body was torn up by the sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi surprisingly easily.

What you are so gleefully cutting up are the bodies of the humans that have become a part of me. Dice them up to your heart's content.

Set's scornful psychic wave seemed to be almost pleased that a somewhat worthy opponent had appeared.

Where is Yumiko! Give her back!

There was no response.

Instead, it appeared as if the space in front of Nakajima suddenly opened up, and with a sickening sound, there stood a boiling swamp of blood. One of the sticky bubbles burst, and a human hand extended out. As if on cue, one by one, naked, stooped-over humans came crawling out of the swamp dripping with fresh blood.

Kill us, kill us! End our misery...

As they pulled themselves out of the swamp, they pulled up their heads with one hand by their blood-matted hair. The faces of those advancing, murmuring as if chanting a spell, were clearly those of Kondo, Takai...all classmates that had lost their lives to the demon Nakajima had summoned, Loki.

Part 7: Chapter 3

Meanwhile, in the Colorado Springs American Air Force Command Center, the over 2000 points displayed on the world map taking up an enormous 50-foot screen could not have been enough. The Space Defense Force was tracking Chinese and Soviet satellites with 99.9% accuracy. The Space Defense Force had decided that the 2000 satellites pointed at the surface needed marking, and that was probably less than 40 percent of them.

The visibly moving points were surveillance satellites launched into low orbit. The slower they moved, the higher their orbits were. At intervals of five degrees, satellites in dead orbit above the equator near North America, Europe, and Japan. Among them, the blinking point at 135 degrees East was Star Scorpion.

Star Scorpion's job was to catch enemy ICBM launch information from recent surveillance satellites, calculate their trajectories, control defense satellites and laser cannons on the surface to intercept them, and order retaliatory strikes from nuclear submarines. It was like a space defense control tower. However, with the SDI not at full capacity yet, 70% of its abilities sat dormant as the satellite floated in space.

"The Demon Summoning Program will only control the satellite's computer temporarily. As long as the demon does not destroy the satellite, you should be able to use it again," explained Professor Baker.

"Don't try to console me. More importantly, we need to make sure that word of this plan doesn't leak out to the Senate. Getting the Senate to recognize the existence of demons would be 100 times harder than getting them to approve an invasion of Nicaragua. And if that summoned demon destroyed the satellite, they'll be screaming over the waste of the 2.5 billion dollars that it cost," replied General Louis, always careful to consider the political implications.

"2.5 billion dollars is nothing. True, the problem is just with one country, Japan, right now, but it's plain as day that if the demon world keeps expanding, the problem will spread to Asia, Eurasia, and eventually North America. This plan is our last-ditch attempt at stopping that." Feed could not hide his irritation.

"60 seconds and counting. 50, 40..." The countdown to the program delivery started.

"20, 10, 9, 8, 7"

"Stop! A Soviet communication satellite is jamming the signal!" cried a general watching a circular display on the console.

The color drained from Feed's face. But General Louis just shrugged his shoulders unconcernedly and said "Don't worry. It's just the same old reaction."

"Give me the number of the transmission beam that was jammed," spoke the businesslike

voice of another general.

"Numbers 2 through 40, and 50 through 80."

"Stop the corresponding beams. Use only beams number 41 through 49."

"Yes, sir."

The countdown to transmission began again.

"...3, 2, 1, starting transmission!"

The host computer started groaning. Messages checking the status of the transmission scrolled down the display one after another.

"Program transmission complete. Ready to stand by." The command center stirred with commotion.

"OK, shut down Star Scorpion's relay functions. The substitute satellite is 145 degrees east, Mark V. Professor Feed, you can start the program any time." General Louis transferred his authority to Feed.

Gripping his ornate cross, Feed's gaze leapt to the small display. The SDF's RPV still was sending footage of the carnage from Japan. Set's pillar of flesh had already grown to the size of a small mountain, and judging from the whole scene, no movement resembling that of anything alive could be ascertained.

Nakajima Akemi...I haven't seen you since before I left. Unfortunately I can't afford to wait any longer. All I can do now is pray that the gods bless Yumiko. Clenching his hand into a fist, he had no way of knowing that at that moment Nakajima had entered Set's body and was fighting therein.

"OK, start the program!" Feed's insides churned as he called out.

Right at that moment, 35,800 kilometers above the equator, the Demon Summoning Program started running inside Star Scorpion.

Part 7: Chapter 4

Without any forewarning, there was an immense change in the atmosphere. At the brink of exhaustion in his fight against Set's psychic waves, Nakajima's spirit was shattered into pieces by an immensely powerful low-frequency rumbling. The mob of zombies that had just crawled out of the lake of blood grabbed their temples with one hand, and their other extended into the air as if seeking help, were crushed in the warping of space.

Everything was being sucked into the storm of an immense magnetic field.

I didn't make it in time...

A new shockwave rocked Nakajima's senses, and he knew that Feed's plan had been taken into action.

Yumiko...!

Nakajima had already resigned himself to his fate. Even should Set be transported into space as expected, now that he was unable to have rescued Yumiko from inside him, a conviction to share her fate had at some point overwhelmed him.

Having come to this resolution, his soul felt light.

Izanami, it would appear that I will have to test the power that you gave me to the limit.

As if embracing the blade of the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, Nakajima folded his arms to his chest and concentrated.

Part 7: Chapter 5

The enormous tower of flesh fought against a tremendous force it had never experienced before. Its slimy peak jutting into the sky seemed to suddenly stiffen for a moment, and a terrible roar louder than thunder ripped through the air.

ZZBH, ZZBH, ZZBH

The atmosphere shuddered, and the base of the several-kilometers-long tower started hovering off the ground bit by bit. Digging a crevasse large enough to swallow the entire forest, the enormous pillar of flesh gradually floated into the sky, taking houses and the asphalt roads with it as it was sucked into a magnetic field vortex like a whirlwind, a tornado tinged of blood and meat.

At a point in the sky, the vortex opened in the center. It was a dimensional rip, like a large blot of ink splotted onto the canvas of the summer sky.

The protoplasmic membrane of the tower rippled with the immensely powerful force tugging on it.

A flash of light temporarily blinded the eyes of the Self Defense Force soldiers that gaped up at the sight, bewildered. By the time they regained their sight, there was nothing above them but an ordinary blue sky.

Part 7: Chapter 6

Accompanied by the glittering of the stars, unending empty space surrounded Nakajima. Below his feet, the endlessly spinning shining blue globe looked up at him. It took him a few moments for him to realize that he was floating in outer space. Nakajima unfolded his arms. In them, he held the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, emitting a strand of light in the blackness of space. Its blade twinkled and throbbed, as if responding to the tens of thousands of stars.

Suddenly, a sinister psychic wave hit Nakajima from behind. It appeared as if Izanami's robe had given him the power to survive and move about in the vacuum of outer space. Swinging his sword, Nakajima slowly turned around, and found his field of vision dominated by an open, gaping red maw.

It was that of an incomprehensibly enormous serpent. Though the demon had only possessed a temporary form on the surface of the earth, the natural effect of powerful magnetic field that had forced him into space had given Set a complete body.

Star Scorpion's 60-foot-long solar cells spread out like wings. Now a giant snake, Set's pale green scales glimmered as he coiled around the beautiful yet functional satellite lying in dead orbit.

It looks like the insignificant humans had enough knowledge to summon me into this empty space. The voice echoed in Nakajima's mind.

But the humans will soon know their folly in thinking that they have banished me. Pulling this satellite down with me to the surface is an easy task. And that is not all. Have a look at all the demons that were summoned here into space!

Beside Nakajima, several pale glowing things that looked like hoods floated aimlessly.

Soon, they will take on bodies and seek safe haven on Earth. The end of the age of the foolish humans' dominion over the earth will not be long now. Nakajima, whether or not you intended, you have become the knight that blows the trumpet signalling the beginning of the apocalypse. The only path remaining for you is to cast aside your humanity and work for me. It would be a shame to kill you. Think it over.

Ignoring Set's call, Nakajima focused all of his anger onto the sword he held directly in front of him. The environment of outer space that had given the demon a body had also removed all restrictions on the divine power he had been granted. The Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi, now an immensely long coil of light, drew an arc like that of a whip emitting red light, and came down onto the body of the enormous serpent.

Fool, you do not value your life. Set lurched forward.

Weaving away from the enormous serpent's attacking fangs, Nakajima was enveloped by a miasma like ice. The Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi had already produced many pale sparks

striking the body of the serpent coiled around the satellite. Yet the tough scales showed no sign of injury. Not only that, but the ugly faces and disgusting tentacles of materializing new demons floated like ghosts in the space around him.

The noisy voices of the demons amplified like they were advancing down on Nakajima.

I'd better do something quick; I don't stand a chance against all these demons if they keep materializing...

Even those demons that managed to materialize fully had trouble maintaining their existence in the Assiah world without a powerful magnetic field. For Set, who was aiming for a full-on invasion of Earth, destroying Star Scorpion would probably be a heavy blow. And in contrast to Set, who could not leave the satellite, Nakajima appeared to have the upper hand, being able to fly about wherever he willed. However, the longer the battle proceeded without reaching a conclusion, the more clear the difference in latent power between the two became. Nakajima's sword seemed heavy in his tired arms, and even appeared to be gradually losing its shine.

However, he could not stop fighting. As minor demons from Set's world continued wriggling while trying to enter the Assiah world, an unmistakably familiar voice echoed in Nakajima's mind.

Nakajima! I'm here! Aim for here!

Yumiko! Is that you!?

The instant Nakajima heard the voice, the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi regained a shine like a nova as it tore through the air.

Stab your sword in the direction of my voice!

Nakajima quickly noticed a pale, white, phosphorescent glow on a part of the enormous serpent's scale-encased body.

Yes, I'm inside the demon! If we attack from inside him and outside him at the same time, we might be able to defeat Set...

Led by Yumiko's voice, Nakajima stabbed his blade toward the phosphorescent glow. But an instant before the tip reached it, the tail of the giant snake forcefully knocked the blade aside and sent Nakajima flying far back. Flipping over and regaining his composure, robe fluttering behind him, Nakajima saw the rolling form of Set uncoiling, as if swimming through the vacuum.

Foolish girl! To think you would let me know that you still live! Now I no longer have to depend on this irritating machine!

Set's thick tail crushed Star Scorpion's wings. The satellite in dead orbit with all its accumulated human knowledge stored on it, exposed to space like a broken toy, was burned to metal junk with a flash. Just like the satellite had, Yumiko's powerful biological Magnetite

formed a powerful magnetic field capable of summoning a demon. So long as she lived inside him, Set no longer had to depend on the magnetic field generated by the satellite. Nothing could have pleased Set more than learning of her survival.

Freed from his spatial constraints, Set could now fly freely throughout space. One moment he seemed to be attacking with his foul, enormous mouth, and the next instant he appeared to vanish into the vacuum, reappearing to strike with his thick, heavy tail; dodging alone took all of Nakajima's concentration.

However, Set's movements appeared to be slowing. Looking closely, it seemed that the minor demons had amassed at one point of the giant serpent's body, clawing at it. Now that the satellite had been destroyed, they had lost the artificially generated magnetic field and were now competing with each other to cling to Set's body in an attempt to materialize in this world. Dodging the now-slowed Set's fangs, Nakajima quickly dove beneath the body of the snake.

Now, Nakajima!

Encouraged by Yumiko's voice, Nakajima stabbed his sword into the throng of lesser demons.

SPLUTCH!

For an instant, as if time had stopped, Set's movements ceased. Like thick glass that had been penetrated by a bullet, cracks started spreading over the scales covering the body of the enormous serpent, centering around the sword lodged in its trunk. After an instant of silence, Set's body shattered into tiny fragments and dispersed into space. Reflected in the light of the sword, Yumiko floated off into space, still tied to the Egyptian cross, floating in a mass of scale fragments that looked like snowflakes.

Yumiko!

As Nakajima anxiously swam through space, Yumiko drifted further and further away in his field of vision. The swarm of minor demons trying desperately to remain in this world clawed at their last hope: Yumiko and the cross she was tied to. But having used the last bits of her power to defeat Set, Yumiko had no way of fighting them off. At this rate, she would be pulled into the demon world along with them.

It's all right, Nakajima. It's best this way... Yumiko's voice echoed in Nakajima's mind.

Don't talk like that! I'll come save you, just hang in there!

No! Please, don't try to save me! If I am pulled into the demon world with these demons, no demons will ever come to Earth again...

Wait! Wait!

Fueled by a determination greater than that of his to fight Set, Nakajima bridged the distance between himself and Yumiko. Nearly within arm's reach, he started wildly swinging

the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi at the demons clinging to her. Its tip grazed the cross, producing pale sparks. At that moment, Nakajima thought he heard cries of joy erupting from the mouths of the demons.

No, Nakajima! Right now this cross is acting like a door between the demon and human worlds. If I leave it, that door will...

Yumiko had no way of knowing how the demon and human worlds were connected. But her intuition told her that an enormous power, clearly different from that of Set's, was held in the cross she was tied to. Yumiko unconsciously realized what awful things might happen should that terrible power be unleashed upon the earth. And she felt that if she died, then such things would be prevented. She bet her life on it.

But Nakajima, focused entirely on Yumiko, had no way of knowing what she was feeling.

"I pick you over the five billion other humans!" Letting out a terrible cry, Nakajima embraced Yumiko's body and sliced the cross in two with the Sword of Hi-no-Kagutsuchi.

The vacuum appeared to burn to Nakajima. An incredible flash shone throughout space.

Still holding each other, the two flew through the vacuum. Nakajima's chest was wet with an endless stream of hot drops. Her eyelids shut tight, covering the eyes crushed by Set, Yumiko stroked Nakajima's cheek as if trying to remember the contours of his face. Her lips trembled slightly. Even though he could not hear her voice, Nakajima knew what those lips were trying to say.

You really, you...

Another pair of warm lips prevented them from continuing any further. Alongside the couple, several red shooting stars cut through space. One let forth a voice of joy, and another let forth a loud laugh. It was a crowd of demons that had been able to make it through the open door for a moment and take form in the human world. But presently that door closed quietly amongst the echoes of the curses of the demons left behind. The two bodies enshrouded by Izanami's robe were already near the blue planet.

Translation by: Masakado

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